

Bryan W. Van Norden

Virtue Ethics *and*  
Consequentialism  
*in* Early Chinese  
Philosophy

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## Virtue Ethics and Consequentialism in Early Chinese Philosophy

In this book, Bryan W. Van Norden examines early Confucianism as a form of virtue ethics and Mohism, an anti-Confucian movement, as a version of consequentialism. The philosophical methodology is analytic, with an emphasis on clear exegesis of the texts and critical examination of the philosophical arguments proposed by each side. Van Norden shows that Confucianism, though similar to Aristotelianism in being a form of virtue ethics, offers different conceptions of “the good life,” the virtues, human nature, and ethical cultivation. Similarly, Mohism is akin to Western utilitarianism in being a form of consequentialism, but it is distinctive in its conception of the relevant consequences and in the specific arguments that it gives on its own behalf. The author makes use of the best current research on Chinese history, archaeology, and philology. His text is accessible to philosophers with no previous knowledge of Chinese culture and to Sinologists with no background in philosophy.

Bryan W. Van Norden is an associate professor in both the philosophy and Chinese and Japanese departments at Vassar College. He has edited and contributed to *Confucius and the Analects: New Essays* and co-edited *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*. A Fulbright Fellow, he has also received grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation, and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.



# Virtue Ethics and Consequentialism in Early Chinese Philosophy

BRYAN W. VAN NORDEN

*Vassar College*



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*To Becky*

*Then she opened up a book of poems  
And handed it to me  
Written by an Italian poet  
From the thirteenth century.  
And every one of them words rang true  
And glowed like burnin' coal  
Pourin' off of every page  
Like it was written in my soul  
From me to you. . . .*

*— Bob Dylan*



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## Preface

This book examines the teachings of the *Analects* of Kongzi (Confucius), early Mohism, and Mengzi using a particular philosophical methodology. Specifically, I interpret Kongzi and Mengzi as virtue ethicists and the early Mohists as consequentialists. I also focus (especially in the case of the early Mohists and Mengzi) on the philosophical arguments they give for their own positions and against those of their opponents. I hope to later extend this methodology to cover the “School of Names” (Gongsun Longzi and Huizi), the “Daoists” (Zhuangzi and the authors of the *Daodejing*), the Neo-Mohists, the Ruist Xunzi, and his student, the “Legalist” Han Feizi.<sup>1</sup>

My aim has been to produce a work that will be accessible to Sinologists with a limited knowledge of philosophy and to philosophers with a limited knowledge of Chinese culture. I have made a special effort to make this work comprehensible to those with no special philosophical background. I hope readers will keep this in mind if my exposition of philosophical terminology and issues seems too elementary at points. Non-philosophers who still find my philosophical terminology daunting may wish to consult *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, edited by Robert Audi. Those without a background in Chinese culture may find helpful the introduction to a volume I edited, *Confucius and the Analects: New Essays*. For a more extensive introduction to early Chinese history and culture, one may consult the authoritative *Cambridge History of Ancient China*, edited by Michael Loewe and Edward Shaughnessy.

<sup>1</sup> The names of schools that I have put in scare quotes are only labels of convenience for loosely related groups of thinkers. The Ruists and Mohists were organized movements (with various factions), but the others were not organized schools during the pre-Qin period.



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I am grateful to my editor at Cambridge University Press, Beatrice Rehl, for her support, to Peter Katsirubas, my liaison at Aptara, Inc., for enthusiastically answering my repeated questions regarding the typesetting process, and to my copyeditor, Brian Bowles, for catching a number of potentially embarrassing errors. Among the people who have commented or provided advice on various parts of this manuscript are Eric Hutton, Michael McCarthy, Franklin Perkins, Philip Quinn, Christine Reno, Haun Saussy, and Eric Schwitzgebel. Paul Rakita Goldin provided especially extensive and helpful comments. I finished part of this manuscript while on a Fulbright Fellowship and a National Endowment for the Humanities Grant in Taiwan. While in Taiwan, Susan Blake and Eirik Harris volunteered to read and discuss my manuscript chapter by chapter. I am in their debt for the many pleasant and productive hours we spent in teahouses, cafes, and restaurants in the alleys of Taipei.

It is fitting that I acknowledge my many unrepayable debts: to the philosophers of the Western and Chinese traditions, especially (in the order I encountered them) Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Kuhn, Kongzi, Thomas Aquinas, Mengzi, and Alasdair MacIntyre; my primary and secondary school teachers, especially Mrs. Wonetta Crouse and Mr. James J. Seabol; my college teachers, especially Charles Kahn, Nathan Sivin, and James Ross; Chad Hansen, whose work first influenced and inspired me when I was an undergraduate; my teachers in graduate school, especially Lee H. Yearley, David S. Nivison, and Philip J. Ivanhoe; the emotional support and guidance provided by Gail Pease, Dr. Hubert Kauffman, and the “Keep It Simple” group of Wappingers Falls, N.Y.; and my colleagues over the years, especially Arthur Kuflick, Margaret Holland, Jennifer Church, and Douglas Winblad. Most of all I owe a debt to my ancestors; my many other friends whom I have not mentioned; my siblings; my parents, Helen K. and Charles R. Van Norden; my children, Charles and Melissa; and my ex-wife, Sarah Rebecca “Becky” Thomas.

## Usage

Dates are identified as B.C.E. and C.E., instead of B.C. and A.D. “C.E.” stands for “Common Era” (and “B.C.E.” for “Before the Common Era”) – meaning the era common to Christianity, Judaism, and the other religions of the world. This is intended not as a way of downplaying the significance of Christianity but merely to provide a usage that is comfortable for non-Christians as well.

Translations from the *Mozi*, *Mengzi*, *Daodejing*, *Zhuangzi*, *Xunzi*, *Han Feizi*, and “Robber Zhi” are adapted freely from Philip J. Ivanhoe and Bryan W. Van Norden, eds., *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*, 2nd rev. ed. unless otherwise indicated. Citations follow the passage numbering in that text. (For long passages in the *Mengzi*, I supply not only the book and chapter number, but also the number of the “verse,” according to James Legge, trans., *Mencius*.) Translations from the *Analects* follow the sectioning in Edward Slingerland, trans., *Confucius: Analects*. I have sometimes modified the translations from *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy* and Slingerland’s *Analects*, so the original translators should not be blamed for any errors I have introduced.

Pinyin Romanization will be used throughout, except in the following cases: citations of titles, quotations from other works, and proper names of individuals who have selected their own Romanizations. Tones will be provided for at least the first occurrence of Romanized words that accompany characters. (If I add tones to a Romanized word in a translation, I do not bother to note that the translation has been modified.)

Two of the most famous philosophers whom I discuss in this work are commonly known in the West as “Confucius” and “Mencius.” However, these names are actually Jesuit Latinizations. Furthermore, “Confucius”

is a Latinization of an extremely rare form of that thinker's name.<sup>1</sup> There is a good case to be made for retaining the Latinizations when writing in English. (After all, I do not refer to Plato as "Platôn.") However, as the world gets smaller, it is more and more important to be able to communicate with other cultures using their own terms. Consequently, in place of the Latinizations "Confucius" and "Mencius" I shall use the more faithful "Kongzi" and "Mengzi." The term "Confucianism" is another Westernism, and one that is potentially quite misleading. The corresponding Chinese term is *rú* 儒, which is etymologically unrelated to the name of Kongzi.<sup>2</sup> This fact sometimes makes the translation "Confucian" quite unworkable (e.g., *Analects* 6.13). More important, it would seem odd to continue to use the term "Confucian" when I no longer use the name "Confucius." Thus, at the risk of seeming quaint, I shall write "Ruism" and "Ruist" in place of "Confucianism" and "Confucian."

In my notes, I use a short citation format, supplying the last name of the author and enough of the title of the work to uniquely identify it. The bibliography at the end provides complete bibliographic information. This format has an advantage over more conventional citation formats. Providing complete bibliographic information in the notes clutters them with redundant information. On the other hand, a reader who encounters "Nivison (1980c)" in a note is highly unlikely (even if she has a good memory) to be able to remember what article is being cited. Likewise, "Nivison, pp. 739–61," forces the reader to page back to find the first reference to the work in question in the notes for that chapter (sometimes easy, sometimes not). However, anyone conversant with the secondary literature will know what article "Nivison, 'Two Roots or One?'" refers to.

<sup>1</sup> On these points, see Jensen, *Manufacturing Confucianism*.

<sup>2</sup> See Jensen, *Manufacturing Confucianism*, as well as Eno, *Confucian Creation of Heaven*, Appendix B, and Zufferey, *To the Origins of Confucianism*, on this vexed term.



# 1

## Introduction

Within the four seas, all are brothers.

– Zixia

I am a human, and nothing human is alien to me.

– Terence

### I. METHODOLOGY

#### I.A. Brief Description

There is often discussion of whether the teachings of the Chinese “masters” (zǐ 子) are “really philosophy.”<sup>1</sup> This is a contentious issue because resolving it depends on deciding what philosophy is in general. I hope in this book to sidestep these issues by stating that I plan to examine the teachings of Kongzi (“Confucius”), the early Mohists, and Mengzi (“Mencius”) from a particular sort of philosophical perspective. One can examine almost any text from a philosophical perspective, whether or not one regards that text as “genuinely philosophical.” Of course, applying a philosophical perspective to a text may be more or less fruitful. And there may be disagreement over whether the results *have* been fruitful. For example, most contemporary philosophers seem to think that – although they are crucial background reading for anyone interested in Greek cosmology – the writings of Hesiod yield little when examined philosophically, but a few think that asking certain philosophical

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Hatton, “Chinese Philosophy or ‘Philosophy’?”; Eno, *Confucian Creation of Heaven*, pp. 1–13; Hall and Ames, *Thinking through Confucius*, pp. 313–36; Solomon, “What Is Philosophy?”; Defoort, “Is There Such a Thing as Chinese Philosophy?”

questions reveals important aspects of Hesiod's writings.<sup>2</sup> I believe that we can learn much through applying a philosophical perspective to the Chinese "masters."

Philosophers use specialized terminologies and are concerned with specialized issues. Scholars from other intellectual disciplines (social history, anthropology, sociology, literary criticism, etc.) may approach the same texts from other perspectives – which can be equally worthwhile. In fact, other philosophers would employ different terminologies and focus on different issues.

The particular sort of philosophical perspective that I shall employ has two features: it is, for want of a better term, "analytic," and it appeals to "virtue ethics" to help illuminate Ruism ("Confucianism"). "Virtue ethics" is a phrase well known to Western ethicists. I discuss virtue ethics in more detail in §II, but, briefly, virtue ethics focuses on what sort of person one should be, and what way of life one should live. Although it is not a Chinese term, I think that Ruism counts as a form of virtue ethics – but a kind of virtue ethics different in many respects from the forms of virtue ethics that have been dominant in the West. These differences have the potential to challenge us and contribute to ongoing philosophical debates by making us aware of new conceptions of the virtues and of ways of living a worthwhile life. (I discuss the potential contribution of Ruism to contemporary ethics in Chapter 5, §II–III.) Furthermore, I believe that applying the vocabulary of virtue ethics illuminates many interesting aspects of Ruism that might otherwise go unnoticed.

The distinction in Western philosophy between "analytic" and "non-analytic" philosophies is not a sharp one. However, what I mean in saying that I am employing an analytic philosophical perspective is that I am especially concerned with the following: finding, interpreting, and evaluating arguments in the texts; clarifying the meaning of the texts by spelling out interpretive alternatives and examining whether some make better sense of the text than others; and exploring whether each text is self-consistent.

An "analytic" methodology may seem disturbingly unfamiliar to scholars working in other intellectual disciplines for at least three reasons. First, some Sinologists are deeply influenced by "postmodernism" (as

<sup>2</sup>The common view is evident in Kirk et al., *Presocratic Philosophers* (although even here it is acknowledged that Hesiod is more systematic and critical than Homer [pp. 7, 34]). On the other hand, Mitchell H. Miller finds more value in a philosophical approach to Hesiod ("Implicit Logic of Hesiod's Cosmogony," especially pp. 131–32). See also Miller, "First of All": On the Semantics and Ethics of Hesiod's Cosmogony."

evident in, for example, Bernard Faure's *Chan Insights and Oversights*). "Postmodernism" is another loose and only sometimes helpful label. The term has been in use since the early twentieth century and is used by different thinkers in different ways in different intellectual disciplines. However, one of the most influential characterizations was given by Jean-François Lyotard, who described it as "incredulity toward metanarratives."<sup>3</sup> I take him to mean the following. A narrative is any account or story, such as evolutionary theory. A metanarrative is a story about why a particular narrative is justified, or why we ought to believe it. For example, a metanarrative might say that scientific theories (such as evolution) are objectively true because they frame hypotheses that are unbiased by considerations of politics or personality and are based on only what is directly observable. Now, many philosophers and historians of science would reject the particular metanarrative I just sketched. We now know that there are no pure observations; all observations are "theory-laden." In addition, psychological and sociological factors bias scientific results to a great degree.<sup>4</sup> However, postmodernism's "incredulity toward metanarratives" means not believing that *any* metanarrative is justified. In other words, one does not regard as objectively warranted any claims to truth.

Postmodernists and "analytic" philosophers often find themselves in opposition.<sup>5</sup> Personally, I think that the best postmodern philosophy and the best analytic philosophy are both interesting and important and that they can be brought into a fruitful dialogue. But my style is more analytic than postmodern, and this will grate on some of my readers. Nonetheless, I do not think that anything I have written or assumed in this book has to be rejected by a postmodernist. I do not assume that a text has one unique meaning, or that its meaning is transparent, or that its meaning is determined by authorial intent, or that its meaning is timeless, or that an interpretation can be proven to be true with Cartesian certainty. (I would agree with postmodernists in rejecting each of these assumptions.) I assume only that, for a particular intellectual context in which an interpreter (such as myself) is writing, with a particular intellectual agenda (understanding texts both in their contexts of production as well as how they functioned for later interpretive communities), there are better and

<sup>3</sup>Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition*, p. 482.

<sup>4</sup>See, for example, Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Pickering, *Constructing Quarks*, Waller, *Einstein's Luck*, and Hooper, *Of Moths and Men*.

<sup>5</sup>For some samples of the debate, see Carnap, "Elimination of Metaphysics," Derrida, *Limited, Inc.*, and Sokal and Bricmont, *Fashionable Nonsense*.

worse readings of those texts, and that one can argue (using the particular intellectual standards of one's community) for the strength of some interpretations over others. I think this is a fairly modest hermeneutic principle.

A second aspect of an analytic methodology (especially when it is applied to historical works) is for the focus of attention to narrow down to the meaning of brief portions of the text (even down to individual sentences or words). However, for many Sinologists the paradigms are works that cover a wider scope, such as Mark Lewis's *Sanctioned Violence in Early China*, or Lionel Jensen's *Manufacturing Confucianism*. Of course, a narrow focus of interpretation runs the danger of missing the larger interpretive picture. However, there is also the opposite danger of building a broad view on specifics that have not been well established.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the close reading of a text is a well-established methodology not just in analytic thought, but in many interpretive traditions, including the natively Chinese "Evidential Research" movement *Kǎozhèng zhī xué* (考證之學).

A third aspect of my approach that may be off-putting to some readers is that I am largely employing a "hermeneutic of restoration" rather than a "hermeneutic of suspicion." Paul Ricoeur coined these terms to describe two broad trends in interpretation.<sup>7</sup> When employing a hermeneutic of suspicion, one seeks to understand a text by finding ulterior motives or causes for the composition of the text that are unrelated to any justification for the truth claims made by the text. Such a hermeneutic tries to "unmask" the pretensions of the text to truth and to get at its "real motives." Ricoeur identified Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud as the "masters of suspicion" (and now we might add Foucault to the list). For example, in *Two Treatises of Government*, John Locke claimed to be objectively investigating the basis of property rights and governmental authority. But in actuality, a Marxist would say, he is expressing and promoting what is in the interest of the bourgeoisie, the social class of which he is a member. Similarly, the dialectical method of argumentation used by Socrates and Plato is not, Nietzsche argues, a disinterested search for Truth and the Good, but is instead a tool for exercising power over others with words instead of with fists. In other words, texts lie, and the hermeneutic of

<sup>6</sup>I would not say that this is true of either Lewis's or Jensen's works. But broad surveys should, like theirs, be built out of solid details.

<sup>7</sup>Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, pp. 28–36.

suspicion seeks to figure out why they lie. Generally, those who practice a hermeneutic of suspicion hold that authors are not themselves conscious of the true causes or motives that underlie the production of their texts. (Freud's notion of the subconscious is intended, in part, to explain how people can have and act out of motives of which they are not themselves aware.) However, Robert Eno is also using a hermeneutic of suspicion when he argues that the early Ruists were self-conscious about concocting philosophical arguments merely in order to get the patronage of rulers, so as to fund their ritual activities.<sup>8</sup>

In contrast, a hermeneutic of restoration is based on the expectation (or "faith" as Ricoeur also calls it) that the text addresses me, because language "is not so much spoken by men as spoken to men."<sup>9</sup> The text may be mistaken, but it does not "lie." The task of interpretation is to hear the message. Again, the message sought is only a message as I hear it now in my context, and even then it need not be a univocal message, but it is still a message, whose claim to truth challenges me and my view of the world, whatever that may be.

One way of understanding the distinction between hermeneutics of suspicion and restoration is to consider how they seek to answer the question, "Why does he believe that?" Suppose Arthur believes that spirit mediums can contact the dead and relay messages from them. A hermeneutic of restoration would examine what justifications he has for this belief. Arthur felt the table move during the séance. He saw some substance, which he believed to be "ectoplasm," emanate from the medium. The medium said things that his deceased son would have said. In the end, we may conclude that Arthur's beliefs are not justified. There are more plausible explanations for all of Arthur's observations than successful contact with "the spirit world." But as long as we are examining Arthur's beliefs in terms of their possible justifications (including their possible failures as justifications), we are using a hermeneutic of restoration. In contrast, we would be using a hermeneutic of suspicion if we said that Arthur believes in spirit mediums because he is grieving over the premature death of his son, so he wants desperately to believe that there is life after death and that he can still communicate with his son. Arthur's desire to contact his

<sup>8</sup> Eno, *Confucian Creation of Heaven*. For a critique of this aspect of Eno's position, see Shun, Review of the *Confucian Creation of Heaven*. But there are still many valuable insights in Eno's book that are independent of his more controversial general thesis about Ruism.

<sup>9</sup> Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, p. 29.

deceased son may be the *cause* for his belief, but it is unrelated to any *justification* for the truth of that belief.<sup>10</sup>

Those who prefer to approach historical texts with a hermeneutic of suspicion may find naive any project like my own. But I think different hermeneutic strategies can complement one another. To not see that, historically speaking, Ruism has frequently acted as an ideology that supports the interests of certain social classes is to be dangerously naive. But this does not rule out the possibility that Ruists have also had some insights into the human condition, that this partially accounts for the fact that Ruism has engaged brilliant minds in various cultures for more than two millennia, and that we might learn something ourselves from Ruist texts. Furthermore, the effort to employ only a hermeneutic of suspicion is incoherent. To read Marx and believe that he has accurately described the genesis of philosophical ideas is to read Marx himself with a hermeneutic of restoration. And if Marx is entitled to be read with a hermeneutic of restoration, then so is Locke.

Generally speaking, my plea here would be for methodological pluralism. There are a number of disciplines and methodologies that can be applied to texts in ways that are illuminating. This does not entail, of course, that just anything goes. If what we say has any content, it must rule some things out. However, one should not reject out of hand an “analytic” methodology (or any other approach) simply because it does not meet one’s preconceptions about how texts are to be studied.

One of the most important commitments of a hermeneutic of restoration is “the principle of charity.” In the Anglophone world, W. V. O. Quine brought this principle to prominence and gave it one of its most influential formulations: “one’s interlocutor’s silliness, beyond a certain point, is less likely than bad translation.”<sup>11</sup> In other words, we weigh it against an interpretation if it attributes to someone a belief that we regard as not just false but absurdly so. Quine’s student, Donald Davidson, fine-tuned the principle, noting that “disagreement and agreement alike are intelligible only against a background of massive agreement.”<sup>12</sup> For example, I may find utterly absurd your belief that Linda is possessed by demons. However, for you and I to disagree about whether Linda’s

<sup>10</sup> My example is based on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who was, ironically, the creator of Sherlock Holmes (a literary paradigm of rationality) but also a firm believer in spiritualism. His attraction to spiritualism was, in fact, consequent upon the death of several of his close family members.

<sup>11</sup> Quine, *Word and Object*, §13, p. 59.

<sup>12</sup> Davidson, “Radical Interpretation,” p. 137.

aberrant behavior is caused by a chemical imbalance in her brain or by demonic possession, we have to agree about a large number of things: that Linda is a human being, that Linda's behavior is out of the ordinary, that we are in the room with Linda now, that she just spewed green slime on you, and so on.

Both Quine and Davidson stress the holism of meaning. As Davidson put it, "If sentences depend for their meaning on their structure, and we understand the meaning of each item in the structure only as an abstraction from the totality of sentences in which it features, then we can give the meaning of any sentence (or word) only by giving the meaning of every sentence (and word) in the language."<sup>13</sup> So words have meaning because of the roles they play in sentences, and sentences have meaning because of the words that make them up. But this is only part of the holism. The meaning of a sentence also depends on the relationships between it and other sentences: what sentences does it seem to entail? What sentences does it seem to rule out? Furthermore, sentences have meaning not just in terms of other linguistic items, but in terms of the complete "form of life" of the community that uses them. What this entails is that our evidence for the interpretation of an individual word is that it makes the best sense out of the sentences in which that word occurs; our evidence for the interpretation of a sentence is that it makes sense of the role that sentence plays in the pattern of other sentences in the language, as well as what we know about the meanings of the individual words that make the sentence up; and our attributions of lexical and sentential meaning must make sense of the entire way of life – historical, physical, cultural – of the community we are studying.<sup>14</sup>

Richard Grandy has proposed a helpful modification of the principle of charity, which he labels the "principle of humanity." Grandy notes that, especially in cases where we attribute falsehoods to someone, we should place "heavy emphasis on the importance of taking into consideration the speaker's past history, both his verbal conditioning and his nonverbal stimulations."<sup>15</sup> In other words, we may legitimately attribute to people false beliefs – even beliefs that seem wildly false to us – if an understanding of their larger linguistic and social context explains how humans who

<sup>13</sup> Davidson, "Truth and Meaning," p. 22.

<sup>14</sup> In literary criticism and among non-analytic philosophers, Saussure's work is more commonly treated as the locus classicus of meaning holism (*Course in General Linguistics*). Not everyone subscribes to holism, though. For a sustained critique, see Fodor and LePore, *Holism*.

<sup>15</sup> Grandy, "Reference, Meaning, and Belief," p. 449.

are substantially like us could have held those beliefs in that context. For example, it is obvious to me that a dropped stone is pulled toward the Earth by an external force, gravity. However, an understanding of his linguistic, historical, and social context allows me to see why Thomas Aquinas thought such a stone is self-moving, impelled by a sort of “love” to move toward its natural location in absolute space. So the “principle of humanity” says that the errors we attribute to those we interpret must be explicable as errors that our fellow human beings could plausibly make.

It is crucial to understand the principles of charity, humanity, and holism.<sup>16</sup> But it is equally crucial to see what they do not entail. For example, holism does not entail that individual “pieces” of textual evidence do not matter or that they may be handled carelessly. A holistic interpretation of a text in its historical context must explain in detail (1) how it interprets particular words and sentences in a plausible manner; (2) how it handles passages that seem, *prima facie*, difficult for it to account for; and (3) why it does so better than the best alternative interpretations. The situation seems parallel with that in natural science. It is a commonplace now that there are no pure observations that ground science; every observation is “theory-laden.” In addition, theoretical concepts are related holistically.<sup>17</sup> These natural scientific facts are analogous to the hermeneutic facts that meaning is holistic and that we cannot “ground” an interpretation in words and sentences that come to us with absolute meanings. But, in the case of natural science, these facts do not mean that a scientific theory cannot be seriously challenged by (comparatively) observational evidence. Likewise, in hermeneutics, an overall interpretation can be challenged if it does not have explanations of numerous pieces of the text or if it has explanations that seem forced and convoluted.

Furthermore, it is not a legitimate application of either the “principle of charity” or the “principle of humanity” to reject an interpretation simply on the grounds that it attributes to a philosopher a view that *we* regard as mistaken. Most philosophers disagree with each other about

<sup>16</sup> The insights of Quine, Davidson, Grandy, and others were reached independently by those in the Hermeneutic tradition (such as Hans-Georg Gadamer) who formulated them in terms of the “hermeneutic circle.” See Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, especially pp. 265–307. For a helpful introduction to Gadamer’s thought, see Part 3 of Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Duhem, *Aim and Structure of Physical Theory*, Quine, “Two Dogmas of Empiricism,” Sellars, “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind,” Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.



most philosophical issues, so most of us are mistaken about these issues. For example, I think Hume's empiricism and his ethical antirealism are both wildly false, and his arguments for each are quite mistaken. But I can hardly argue that Hume could not possibly have *believed* in empiricism merely because I think he was wrong to do so. Charity and humanity rule out only inexplicable or massive error.

### I.B. Three Objections

But even if one grants me my methodology, one may wonder whether I have applied it in a way that illuminates, rather than distorts, the texts I am interpreting. It should go without saying (although sometimes it does not) that it is not a sufficient objection to merely *accuse* another scholar of projecting an alien conceptual scheme onto a text. As Kwong-loi Shun observes,

The mere fact that an account of an early Chinese thinker's views goes beyond the relevant text does not by itself render the account problematic. To the extent that the account is more than a reorganization of the text, it will discuss the thinker's views in a contemporary language that already embodies conceptual apparatus alien to the early thinker. Furthermore, to help us understand the thinker's views, the account presumably presents such views with more clarity than the original text and draws connections between ideas where such connections are not explicit.<sup>18</sup>

In other words, anything that goes beyond the most banal and unhelpful paraphrase of the text projects a conceptual scheme onto it. As Hans-Georg Gadamer put it, "A person who is trying to understand a text is always projecting."<sup>19</sup> At the same time, a given conceptual scheme can be more or less faithful to a text. And one must substantiate an interpretation (or an objection to an interpretation) with specific textual evidence. The more evidence, the more convincing one's case.

Of course, one might also object to my approach on more specific grounds. Elsewhere, I have sketched what I take to be some of the major approaches to the study of Chinese philosophy today.<sup>20</sup> Based on my earlier typology, I imagine three major lines of objection to my approach.

<sup>18</sup> Shun, *Mencius and Early Chinese Thought*, p. 9.

<sup>19</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 267.

<sup>20</sup> Van Norden, "What Should Western Philosophy Learn from Chinese Philosophy?" and "America's Encounter with Confucian Thought."

*I.B.I. Was There Argumentation in Ancient China?*

Donald Munro influenced many interpreters with his insistence that the early Chinese masters were inept at philosophical argumentation and that “questions of truth and falsity were not” important to them. Munro adds that the “Chinese thinker’s regrettable lack of attention to the logical validity of a philosophical tenet is balanced by his great concern with problems important to human life.”<sup>21</sup> Angus Graham appears to be in agreement with Munro when he says of early Chinese philosophers that “the crucial question for all of them is not the Western philosopher’s ‘What is the truth?’ but ‘Where is the Way?’, the way to order the state and conduct personal life.”<sup>22</sup> Graham emphasized another important difference between Western and Chinese philosophy: formal logic was never discovered in China. We do find, in the writings of the later Mohists, brilliant and fascinating discussions of issues in the philosophy of language and what we would call “dialectics,” but the Mohists have a “lack of interest in establishing logical forms,” and Graham suggests that their approach is not an investigation of syllogistic reasoning but “is much more like the argumentation of Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical investigations* and Gilbert Ryle’s *Concept of mind*.”<sup>23</sup>

Graham’s general point is somewhat obscured by the fact that he does not restrict his use of the term “logic” to “formal logic.” (Hence, one of his seminal books is entitled “Later Mohist Logic, Ethics and Science” despite the fact that he denies the Mohists or anyone else in China discovered *formal* logic.) Formal logic is concerned with patterns of premises and conclusions in which the truth of the premises would guarantee the truth of the conclusion, regardless of how the variables in the patterns are filled out. However, Western philosophers of language have recently come to recognize the importance of “opaque contexts,” in which (paradoxically) substitution of a term with another term that refers to the very same thing does not result in a valid inference. For example, from “Lois Lane thinks Clark Kent is unattractive” we may not infer “Lois Lane thinks Superman is unattractive.” Interestingly, the later Mohists seemed particularly concerned with opaque contexts and noticed that, if “Jill loves her brother” is true, and if her brother is a handsome man, it may nonetheless not be true that “Jill loves a handsome man” (since the latter

<sup>21</sup> Munro, *Concept of Man in Early China*, p. ix. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 55. Interestingly, among Munro’s students were Eno, who argues that Ruists are not serious about the arguments they produce, and Chad Hansen, who believes that the arguments of Ruists like Mengzi are “atrociously inept and unconvincing” (*Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, p. 188).

<sup>22</sup> Graham, *Disputers*, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> Graham, *Later Mohist Logic*, p. 44 (capitalization of titles *sic*).

suggests romantic love).<sup>24</sup> Perhaps the early recognition of opaque contexts discouraged the search for formally valid patterns of inference. In any case, the works by Wittgenstein and Ryle to which Graham refers are similar in spirit to the later Mohist essays, in that they are not concerned with “formal logic” but rather explore the diverse ways in which language is used – as a means of lessening certain philosophical confusions that result from the mistaken assumption that language operates in uniform ways.

However, since Munro wrote the comments I cited earlier, we have made extensive progress in recognizing and coming to better understand the argumentation in early Chinese texts. Furthermore, as Graham was aware, the facts that he notes do not demonstrate that there was no concern with truth and no construction of arguments in early China. It has been suggested that “Without an attempt to render explicit the logical forms of argumentation, discourse establishing the truth of this or that, would not be possible.” However, it was not until Aristotle that formal logic was invented in the West. Does this mean that Aristotle’s predecessors Parmenides, Socrates, and Plato were *not* interested in truth or were *not* arguing rationally?<sup>25</sup> As Graham once observed,

The logical relations in Hui Shi’s demonstration to Zhuangzi that he does not know the fish are happy,<sup>26</sup> or the proof in [the Mohist *Canon*] that the number of men being infinite is compatible with loving them all,<sup>27</sup> are transcultural. The validity, for him and for us, of the accidental syllogism in Wang Chong’s *Dao xu* . . . (“Man is a thing; though honoured as king or noble, by nature he is no different from other things. No thing does not die, how can man be immortal?”) has nothing to do with whether he has a concept of Reason, or knows that he is using sentences or that the form is syllogistic.<sup>28</sup>

In addition, a concern with finding the best way to live (as individuals and as a group) is not inconsistent with a concern for the truth.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>24</sup> For discussions, see Graham, *Later Mohist Logic*, pp. 40–44, and Zong, “Intensional Contexts in Mohist Writings.” On opaque contexts in general, see Kaplan, “Opacity.”

<sup>25</sup> Hall and Ames, *Thinking from the Han*, p. 132. Hall and Ames also write, “To expect discussions of truth sustained by rational arguments we would have to find among the Chinese at least the beginnings of truth functional logic” (ibid., p. 131). If this were true, then even Aristotle did not offer rational arguments for the truth of claims since he pioneered *predicate* logic, but it was not until the Stoics that *truth-functional logic* was developed.

<sup>26</sup> *Zhuangzi* 17, “Autumn Floods,” *Readings*, p. 247.

<sup>27</sup> See Graham, *Disputers*, p. 169.

<sup>28</sup> Graham, “Reflections and Replies,” p. 294. (I have supplied a missing parenthesis in Graham’s text.)

<sup>29</sup> Kwong-loi Shun makes similar observations (*Mencius and Early Chinese Thought*, pp. 5–9).

Indeed, a concern with how one should live might lead us to see it as very important that we recognize certain truths (e.g., truths about what succeeded or failed in the past, or about what human psychology is like). Thus, Kongzi laments the fact that insufficient documentary evidence (zhēng 徵) has been preserved of the Xia and the Shang dynasties (3.9) and praises scribes who leave a blank in a text when they are unsure of the character they are copying rather than introduce an error (15.26).<sup>30</sup> The later Ruist Mengzi shows a similar concern with truth:

Wan Zhang asked, "Someone said that the sage Boli Xi sold himself to a herder in the state of Qin for five ramskins, and fed cattle, because he sought to meet Duke Mu of Qin. Is this story trustworthy (xìn 信)?"

Mengzi said, "It is not (fǒu 否). That is not the case (bù rán 不然). This was fabricated by those obsessed with taking office." (5A9)

In this passage, Mengzi and his disciple Wan Zhang are unambiguously concerned with the issue of whether a particular story is or "is not so" (*bu ran*). This is a concern with truth. Mengzi also famously questioned the historicity of the Ruist classic, the *Documents*: "It would be better to not have the *Documents* than to completely believe it. I accept only two or three passages in the 'Completion of the War' chapter" (7B3). The issue here is whether the *Documents* is truthful in what it reports about King Wu.<sup>31</sup>

Meanwhile, on the other side of the world during the same century, the Pythagoreans, who coined the term "philosophia," were also deeply concerned from the beginning of their movement with living well and with effecting a positive transformation of society. Indeed, "there is good reason to believe that in the early part of the fifth century [B.C.E.] members of the Pythagorean society attained positions of political power

<sup>30</sup> For further discussion of Kongzi as a conscientious scholar, see Creel, *Confucius*, pp. 100–8.

<sup>31</sup> David Nivison points out in his "Mengzi as Philosopher of History" that Mengzi is motivated to make such claims because of his "speculative philosophy of history," which "is guided by a nonempirical commitment, either as to what is, that is metaphysics, or what ought to be, that is, values" (p. 283). In other words, a modern critical historian would ask what our historical sources are, how those sources were transmitted and preserved, how far removed in time those sources are from what they describe, and so on. Mengzi shows no interest in any of these issues. He simply "knows" what Boli Xi (for example) would have done or would not have done, based on the fact that Boli Xi is a sage, and that Mengzi himself has insight into the actions of sages. However, this does not affect my point: whatever methodology he employed to determine what the truth was, Mengzi was clearly concerned with what was or was not true about Boli Xi (in the case of 5A9) or King Wu (in the case of 7B3).

throughout southern Italy.”<sup>32</sup> A little later in Greece, Socrates emerged as a paradigmatic philosopher. There is much debate over what Socrates’ views were, but, if we know anything about him, we know that he was deeply committed to living a virtuous life and that, *because* he cared about living a virtuous life, he sought to expose ignorance and discover truth through philosophical dialogue.<sup>33</sup> Socrates’ disciple, Plato, is in many ways a paradigm of a philosopher whose metaphysical and epistemological views are utterly alien from anything one finds in the early Chinese tradition. However, anyone who has read Plato’s autobiographical *Seventh Letter* knows that his intense desire to find the truth grew out of revulsion at the lack of virtue in Athens. It is worth quoting at length:

When I was young my experience was the same as that of many others. I thought that as soon as I became my own master I would immediately enter into public life. But it so happened that fateful changes occurred in the political situation.

In the government then existing, hated as it was by many, a revolution took place. The revolution was headed by fifty-one leaders, of whom . . . thirty formed the highest political authority with unlimited powers. Of these some were relatives and acquaintances of mine, and they invited me to join their administration as if I were entitled to do so. What I then experienced was not surprising considering my youth; for I imagined that they would administer the state by leading it out of an unjust way of life into a just way, and consequently I paid close attention to see what they would do. What I saw in fact was that these men within a short time caused us to look back upon the former government as a golden age. Above all, they tried to send my aged friend Socrates – whom I would, without scruple, call the most just of men then living – along with others after one of the citizens to take him by force so that he might be put to death, their object being apparently that Socrates, whether he wished to or not, should be made to participate in their political actions; he, however, refused to obey and risked the worst penalties rather than be a participant in their unholy practices. So when I saw these things and others of a similar serious nature, I was revolted and I withdrew from these evils. Not long afterward the power of the Thirty was overthrown together with the whole of the government which then existed. And once again, though less urgently, I was seized with a desire to take part in public affairs. . . . Yet, as misfortune would have it, certain men of authority summoned our companion Socrates before the law courts, raising

<sup>32</sup> Kahn, *Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans*, p. 7.

<sup>33</sup> The problem is that all we know about Socrates we know from what others said about him, and we already find quite different portrayals in accounts by three contemporaries: Aristophanes, Xenophon, and Plato. For one, admittedly controversial, effort to determine the teachings of the historical Socrates, see Vlastos, *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher*.

against him a most criminal charge, one that Socrates, of all men, least deserved. For the indictment was based on the charge of impiety against the gods of the city; and the judges upheld the indictment and put to death the man who, at the very time when they themselves had the misfortune to be in exile, refused to take part in the criminal arrest of a friend of the exiled party.

When, therefore, I considered all this, and the type of men who were administering the affairs of the state, and the laws and customs too – the more I considered all this, and the more I advanced in years myself, the more difficult appeared to me the task of managing the affairs of the state rightly. . . . So I was compelled, praising true philosophy, to declare that she alone enables men to discern what is justice in the state and in the lives of the individuals. The generations of mankind, therefore, would have no cessation from evils until either the class of those who are true and genuine philosophers came to political power or else the men in political power, by some divine dispensation, became true philosophers.<sup>34</sup>

The vision Plato expresses in this last paragraph of social reform through putting philosophers into positions of authority is clearly similar (if only in rough outline) to Kongzi's hope of reforming society by putting into power "gentlemen" (jūnzǐ 君子) who have been educated into virtue. The rest of the *Seventh Letter* bears witness to Plato's political concerns in an even more dramatic way, for it describes Plato's concrete effort to establish an ideal state by winning over Dionysios, the ruler of Syracuse, and the tragic failure of that project. Here, we notice the similarity to Kongzi's (failed) efforts to find a ruler who would put his ideas into practice.

They end up philosophically at very different places: Plato's emphasis on mathematical knowledge as a paradigm and his transcendent metaphysics are completely alien to the thought of Kongzi. But Plato and almost every major ancient Chinese philosopher *begin* with the concern that their society is in a state of crisis: their contemporaries fail to live worthwhile lives; people steal from, lie to, and cheat one another; governments do not benefit the governed. In general, the differences between Western and Chinese philosophers regarding truth seem to be a matter of emphasis. Plato wants to help people learn the truth because he thinks this will show them how to live well; Kongzi wants to show his disciples

<sup>34</sup> Translation from Friedländer, *Plato*, pp. 3–5 (citing *Letter VII* 324b–326b). Friedländer's book is a profound meditation on Plato that stresses the practical motivation for his philosophizing. (Not all scholars accept the *Seventh Letter* as authentic. However, Plato's deep ethical concern is at the forefront of most of his dialogues, which typically begin by stressing the importance of figuring certain things out ["What is courage?" "What is justice?"] so that one can *become* virtuous.)

how to live well, but he thinks they have to know many truths in order to do this.

Finally, scholars of Western philosophy are aware that identifying, interpreting, and evaluating arguments is extremely difficult work, especially when one is dealing with historical texts that may use a different vocabulary from ours, or make assumptions we do not share and may even not be aware of. Hardly anyone would accuse Plato, Hume, or Kant of being philosophically inept, yet it seems unlikely that there will ever be an end to disagreements over how to interpret their works or over whether they are consistent.<sup>35</sup> This fact cuts in two directions. Scholars already working on Chinese thought should not be quick to dismiss the argumentative quality of these texts merely because the arguments are sometimes difficult to interpret. In addition, since Western philosophers rise to the challenge of analyzing and interpreting the arguments in works from their own tradition, they should not begrudge Chinese texts the same effort. I am not asking that Chinese texts be given any special dispensation; I am simply asking that they not be judged by *higher* standards of argumentation, relevance, or consistency than their Western philosophical counterparts.<sup>36</sup>

### *I.B.2. Was There Virtue Ethics in Ancient China?*

I.B.2.A. THROUGH THICK AND THIN. The other major feature of my approach – the use of the categories of Western virtue ethics – is open to the charge that it inaccurately assimilates Aristotelianism and Ruism when these worldviews are, in fact, radically different. Sometimes this charge is formulated in a manner that itself unfairly assimilates Aristotelianism to either Kantianism or Platonism. Early Ruism has much less in common with Kantianism or Platonism than with Aristotelianism.<sup>37</sup> In

<sup>35</sup> An intriguing example is Kant's "Transcendental Deduction." This work (in two versions no less!) is extremely important philosophically, but it is also devilishly difficult to interpret. The difficulties of interpreting an historical work of philosophy are illustrated by the fact that Kant seems to be employing a legal sense of the term "deduction" – apparently a common use in Kant's era – that is quite different from the logical sense most contemporary philosophers would attribute to it (Henrich, "Kant's Notion of a Deduction").

<sup>36</sup> I give a thin characterization of argumentation, and present some samples of Chinese philosophical arguments, in §III of this chapter. In the Appendix, I dispute some arguments that there is no concern with truth in early Chinese philosophy.

<sup>37</sup> David Wiggins argues that Aristotle's views on ethical thinking were "nothing remotely resembling what has been ascribed to him by his Kantian and other deontomaniac interpreters" ("Deliberation and Practical Reason," p. 231). (On "deontology," see §II.A of this chapter.) My reading of Aristotle has been deeply influenced by Wiggins, as well as

addition, quick rejection of the application of virtue ethics to Ruism may flow from the assumption that the Chinese and Western philosophical traditions are essentially incommensurable.<sup>38</sup> I believe that to *assume* such incommensurability is to be guilty of the sort of cultural essentialism that Uma Narayan describes as “a picture in which cultures appear neatly, prediscursively, individuated from each other; in which the insistence on ‘Difference’ that accompanies the ‘production’ of distinct ‘cultures’ appears unproblematic; and the central or constitutive components of ‘culture’ are assumed to be ‘unchanging givens.’”<sup>39</sup> I agree with Narayan that this sort of essentialism is typically both false to the actual diversity of individual cultures and often politically dangerous. It is false because real cultures are never monolithic: they are intrinsically complex, with competing voices present from the beginning, and they evolve over time. And to falsely portray a culture as having one essence is politically dangerous because it plays into the hands of fundamentalists – be they Christian, Islamic, Jewish, Hindu, or Ruist – who portray their own narrow view of the tradition as *the* correct one. This allows them to play the political trick of offering people a false dichotomy: be faithful to the traditions of our people *or* argue and innovate, thereby betraying those traditions. But arguing and innovating have always been a part of every healthy tradition.

However, I would certainly agree completely that Aristotelianism and Ruism disagree significantly over many major issues – what the virtues are, what a good life is, what the role of the family is in a good life, the significance of ritual in such a life, the role of classic texts in ethical cultivation, and so on. Why, then, expect anything other than distortion to come from approaching Ruism from the perspective of virtue ethics?

The answer depends on the distinction between “thick” and “thin” accounts. One version of this distinction was originally employed by Gilbert Ryle to make a point in the philosophy of mind and then was picked up by anthropologist Clifford Geertz as a way of characterizing

Hampshire’s “Two Theories of Morality” and Nussbaum’s “Discernment of Perception.” I realize that there are alternative ways of reading Kant that make him seem much closer to Aristotle. (See, for example, O’Neill, “Kant after Virtue,” Louden, “Kant’s Virtue Ethics,” Korsgaard, “From Duty and for the Sake of the Noble.”) But my use of Kant in this book is motivated in part by the desire to have a foil to bring out what is distinctive of Ruist virtue ethics. Consequently, I use a reading of Kant that emphasizes the respects in which he is least like the Ruists.

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, Hall and Ames, *Anticipating China*, pp. 153–54, 171–75.

<sup>39</sup> Narayan, “Essence of Culture and a Sense of History,” p. 95. See also Kupperman, *Learning from Asian Philosophy*, pp. 131–44, and Van Norden, Review of *Thinking from the Han*.



what ethnography is. Bernard Williams next applied the terminology to ethical debates within Western culture, and finally Martha Nussbaum suggested that the distinction could be a tool in cross-cultural ethical discussions.<sup>40</sup> Although there are various ways of applying the distinction, my own use will be closest to that of Nussbaum, who suggests that we can give a description of something in at least two ways. We can give a “thin” description, which has little theoretical content and which can be shared by a broad range of discussants who might disagree significantly over many other matters.<sup>41</sup> One might think of the thin description as simply “fixing” the topic of disagreement between participants in a discussion. In contrast, a “thick” description is the detailed account given by a particular participant in the discussion and framed in terms of the distinctive concepts and commitments of that participant. For example, we might give a thin description of the Sun as “the large bright thing in the sky during the day that illuminates the Earth when it is not too cloudy.” One corresponding thick account (that of Hesiod) would be that the Sun is a god. Yet another thick account (that of Anaxagoras) is that the Sun is a hot stone. One Chinese account (that of the Huáinánzǐ 淮南子) is that the Sun is the quintessence (jīng 精) of the qì 氣 of fire.<sup>42</sup> Our own thick account is that the Sun is a mass of fusing hydrogen and helium. It seems obvious that these are competing accounts of the same thing. Using both thick and thin descriptions allows us to describe how this is so. If we acknowledge the thick accounts but deny that there is any corresponding thin account, then it seems that the accounts we have given do not really disagree since they are talking about different things. If “Sun,” when we use the term, means the mass of hydrogen and helium that the Earth revolves around, then Anaxagoras has no view about the Sun. But surely it is implausible to say that “hêlios” does not refer to the same thing as “Sun”?<sup>43</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Ryle, “Thinking and Reflecting,” pp. 474–79, Ryle, “The Thinking of Thoughts,” pp. 484, 487, 489–90, Geertz, “Thick Description,” Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, Nussbaum, “Non-Relative Virtues.”

<sup>41</sup> Interestingly, the Tang Dynasty philosopher Hán Yù 韓愈 makes a similar point in his essay Yuán Dào 原道, noting that some terms, like dào 道, “Way,” and dé 德, “Virtue,” are xū 虛, “empty,” because they have different specific senses for different schools of thought.

<sup>42</sup> For Hesiod’s view, see *Theogony*, lns. 371–74. On Anaxagoras, see Kirk et al., *Presocratic Philosophers*, p. 381 (and cf. Socrates’ comments in the *Apology* 26d). My translation of the *Huainanzi* follows Graham, *Disputers*, p. 332.

<sup>43</sup> My account does not necessitate accepting a “direct-reference” semantics, but I think that a direct-reference interpretation of theoretical terms is consistent with the account

I submit that someone who rejects the thick/thin distinction I have sketched will have to accept one of the following two (unpleasant) alternatives. (1) For a broad range of terms, what have seemed, *prima facie*, to be genuine theoretical disagreements are, in reality, pseudo-disagreements; typically, scientists and philosophers simply change the topic instead of disagreeing. For example, nonflammable fabrics woven from asbestos fibers were known of in China at least as early as the Han Dynasty.<sup>44</sup> Their earliest theoretical account of this fabric (their thick description) was that asbestos was woven from the bark of fireproof trees or the fur of fireproof animals (who were said to inhabit some volcanic mountain).<sup>45</sup> However, the contemporary scientific view (our own thick description) is that asbestos is neither animal nor vegetable – but rather a mineral (calcium magnesium silicate). If we can appeal only to the thick, theoretical descriptions given by a culture, then the ancient Chinese did *not* have any acquaintance with asbestos. Indeed, their expression 火浣布 *huǒ wǎn bù* (“fire-cleaned cloth”) does not refer to anything at all since there is no mountain inhabited by fireproof plants and animals whose bark or fur can be woven into nonflammable cloth. If someone finds this alternative unappealing but still insists on rejecting the thick/thin distinction, then I ask him to (2) provide us with an alternative account in which it is possible for terms in two distinct languages to be coreferential despite substantive difference in the content of the theories in which those terms are embedded. In other words, I ask him to provide an alternative to the thick/thin distinction that would also explain how Hesiod and a modern American astronomer (when discussing the Sun), or ancient Chinese and contemporary scientists (when discussing asbestos), can be offering competing accounts of the same thing.<sup>46</sup> I do not see how someone who rejects the thick/thin distinction can escape the dilemma posed by (1) and (2).

I am giving. Direct reference theories are designed to explain how speakers of the same language can attach different “senses” to the same word yet refer to the same thing. (See Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*.) The thick versus thin distinction is designed to explain how speakers of *different* languages can refer to, and disagree substantially about, the same things. Note that it does *not* follow from what I have said that *every* account regarding a topic in one theory must have a competing account of the same topic in every other theory. In other words, the existence of a thin account of a topic does not necessitate that every language has a thick account of that topic. Aristotelian physics has no thick account of quarks. Contemporary natural science has no thick account of *qi* or of luminous ether.

<sup>44</sup> *Liezi* 5, “The Questions of Tang.” See Graham, *Book of Lieh-tzu*, p. 117.

<sup>45</sup> Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, vol. 3, pp. 655–62.

<sup>46</sup> I think it is likely that, if one succeeded in doing (2), the account would *also* legitimize the sort of ethical comparisons I describe later in the body of this chapter (e.g., between competing accounts of humility or human flourishing).

We can see how the thick/thin distinction applies to ethics by considering the virtue of humility. A thin description of humility would be that it is the stable disposition to have an appropriate attitude toward one's own worth as a person, as well as having the feelings and reactions that fit with that attitude. One might argue that anyone who has any attitude toward humility at all (whether they have a specific word for it or not) could share this characterization of what it is about. However, different thinkers will give different thick accounts of what it is to actually have this attitude. For example, Aristotle speaks of the person who is *megalôpsychos*, "great-souled." The great-souled person is very virtuous, and correspondingly has a high opinion of himself; he thinks that he deserves social esteem and the praise of others. In contrast, Christians emphasize a subordination of one's will to God and a recognition of one's own ethical frailty and dependence on the transforming Grace of God. Many contemporary people in the United States, even ones who identify as Christians, would say that a person should have a high degree of "self-esteem" but should be willing to admit mistakes and show her politeness by not overemphasizing in conversation her intelligence or achievements. Ancient Ruists stress deference: to the sages of antiquity, to tradition, to classical texts, to parents and elders, and to legitimate social superiors (wise teachers, virtuous rulers, etc.).<sup>47</sup> However, Ruists do not have a clear role for the transforming power of superhuman Grace in the way that Christians do. In addition, my sense is that at least some Ruists thought that genuine humility requires a sort of false consciousness in which one underestimates one's own worth. For example, Zhu Xi says of Kongzi, "sages are born understanding and acting at peace. . . . However, their hearts never say of themselves that they have arrived at this point. . . . It is not that in their heart they genuinely regard themselves as sages, and temporarily for this purpose politely decline [the honor]." Similarly, Wang Yangming praised Sage King Shun (who was a paragon of filial piety for his unfailing patience and love toward his abusive father), saying, "Shun always viewed himself as most unfilial and therefore he was able to be filial."<sup>48</sup>

Clearly, there is substantial disagreement here. However, I hope it is also clear that Aristotelians, traditional Christians, contemporary Americans, and Ruists can all be said to be concerned with "humility" in the

<sup>47</sup> In the School of the Way of the Song Dynasty (see §I.B.3), deference to certain nonhuman aspects of reality (the Way, Heaven, the Great Ultimate) comes to have a greater emphasis than before.

<sup>48</sup> See Zhu Xi, *Sishu jizhu*, commentary on *Analects* 2.4, and Wang, *Instructions for Practical Living*, §293. For more on Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming, see §I.B.3.

thin sense I characterized earlier, and that we learn something quite interesting by examining how the various thinkers fill out that concept.<sup>49</sup>

One might object that the term “humility” implies a self-denigrating attitude, so it is appropriate for the traditional Christian or Ruist view but cannot legitimately be applied to the Aristotelian or contemporary American views of the proper attitude toward one’s own value. I think this is true as a claim about how “humility” is frequently used in contemporary English. Part of what this shows is that contemporary English is a very impoverished language for talking about the virtues. But the example of “humility” illustrates a more general point: the use of terms in a particular language is often closely tied to the thick account that is dominant among users of that language. So in adopting a term as a tag for a particular thin account, we will often be stretching its ordinary use. This stretching will be warranted, though, if it allows us to see relevant disagreements cross-culturally.

Notice that framing the disagreements over “humility” in this manner holds out at least the hope that there are grounds for productive debate on the issue. It does not seem, *prima facie*, that it is purely a matter of subjective opinion whether humans are as ethically fragile and as prone to wrongdoing (even in idyllic circumstances) as the (non-Pelagian) Christian tradition has claimed. Neither does it seem simply a matter of opinion what the likely psychological consequences would be of systematically undervaluing one’s own worth (as the Ruists seem to recommend). We cannot hope for uncontestable proof on any of these issues. And it may turn out that, after a long period of debate, we become convinced that these issues are, after all, rationally unresolvable. But we have a promising start.

In this book, though, my aim will not be to demonstrate whose conception of the virtues is right. Rather, my strategy will be to employ a

<sup>49</sup>Although he does not use the “thick” versus “thin” concept distinction, Haun Saussy makes a related point about the term “allegory.” It has been argued that there is no allegory in traditional Chinese literature because allegory assumes “an ontologically dual cosmos,” and this sort of worldview is not found in China (Plaks, *Archetype and Allegory*, p. 93). Saussy observes that this argument is sound only if we take as our paradigm of allegory a work such as Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*. However, there are texts in Western literature that are widely regarded as examples of allegory but do not assume any radical dualism in the universe. When we use a broader characterization of allegory (such as the one given by the first-century Roman rhetorician Quintilian, which Saussy cites) that is adequate to the diversity of allegory within the Western tradition, it seems easy to identify examples of allegory in the Chinese tradition as well (*Problem of a Chinese Aesthetic*, pp. 27–28).

thin characterization of virtue ethics as including four elements (which I discuss more in §II.B): (1) an account of what a “flourishing” human life is like, (2) an account of what virtues contribute to leading such a life, (3) an account of how one acquires those virtues, and (4) a philosophical anthropology that explains what humans are like, such that they can acquire those virtues so as to flourish in that kind of life. Although I agree that Aristotelians and Ruists (as well as Platonists, Augustineans, Thomists, and others) give different thick accounts of these four elements, I think we can usefully think about these different ethical views using this thin schema. Furthermore, I think that using this approach may lead us to interesting aspects of Ruism (e.g., the account of “semblances” of virtues in *Mengzi* 7B37) that we might not have noticed otherwise.

I.B.2.B. THE LEXICAL FALLACY. Note that there are no terms in Classical Chinese corresponding to at least some of the notions that I employ. There is a term, “dé 德,” standardly translated as “Virtue.” But (as the capital letter at the beginning of the word suggests) we are not dealing here with a notion that is quite the same as either the English “virtue” or the Classical Greek “aretê.” *De* is a sort of “ethical force” that a person has, which can have a transformative effect on others. Thus, Kongzi famously says, “The Virtue of a gentleman is like the wind, and the Virtue of a petty person is like the grass – when the wind moves over the grass, the grass is sure to bend” (12.19). A person typically attains this force by possessing good qualities such as benevolence and righteousness (i.e., what we would call “virtues”). And “de” is eventually used to refer to individual virtues, as in Chapter 20 of *The Mean*: “Wisdom, benevolence, and courage – these three are the universal *de* of the world.” But there are some cases where *de* is a bad quality, like a characteristic vice. Thus, Mengzi observed that Kongzi’s disciple Qiu was the Steward of the evil Ji family in Lu but “was unable to transform their *de*” (*Mengzi* 4A14). More importantly, texts that use “de” as a countable term referring to individual virtues date from *after* the period I am studying in this volume. (*The Mean*, for example, probably dates from the third century B.C.E.) Similarly, it is not clear that there is any term in Classical Chinese that corresponds to “flourishing.”<sup>50</sup>

<sup>50</sup> On *The Mean* 20, cf. Legge, *Confucian Analects*, p. 407. For my interpretation of *de*, I have especially relied on Munro, “Origin of the Concept of *Te*,” Nivison, “‘Virtue’ in Bone and Bronze,” Nivison, “Paradox of Virtue,” Pines, *Foundations of Confucian Thought*,

Now, one might object that it distorts Chinese philosophy to interpret it in the light of notions for which there are no terms in Classical Chinese. This objection relies on a principle often appealed to implicitly in criticisms of comparative philosophy but almost never stated outright. Henry Rosemont is an exception, having formulated the principle with admirable explicitness:

the only way it can be maintained that a particular concept was held by an author is to find a term expressing that concept in his text. Thus we cannot say so-and-so had a “theory of X,” or that he “espoused X principles,” if there is no X in the lexicon of the language in which the author wrote.<sup>51</sup>

I shall label the preceding “the lexical fallacy” because (although it is often assumed) I want to argue that it is an erroneous principle.<sup>52</sup> We can see many examples of authors who evidently “have the concept of X,” or “have a view about X,” even though they have no term in their lexicon for X. In some cases, a person “has the concept” even though she lacks a word for it. For example, it seems clear that Anaximander and Anaximenes were doing philosophy, had views about philosophy, and (in some sense) had the concept of philosophy, even though both lived before the Greek term for philosophy, “philosophia,” was coined by the Pythagoreans. Furthermore, Aristotle claims that there are “unnamed virtues,” by which he means virtues that he has a concept for but which do not have names in Greek.<sup>53</sup> Finally, outside of crossword puzzle fans and those in the shoelace industry, almost no English speakers know the word “aglet.” However, I submit that almost all English speakers have the concept of “the plastic or metal tip on the end of a shoelace.”

A slightly different kind of case that illustrates why the lexical fallacy is a fallacy is that of someone who has no one word for a concept because

pp. 180–84, and Xing, “The X Gong Xu.” Nivison argues that the association of royal *de* with good qualities of character may be found already in the oracle bone inscriptions of the twelfth century B.C.E. It is possible that when *The Mean* says that “Chéng 誠 is to make oneself complete,” it is referring to flourishing since flourishing is a sort of full realization of one’s capacities (chapter 25; cf. Legge, *Confucian Analects*, p. 418). However, this is not a common use for that term in early Classical Chinese. Furthermore, the School of the Way (§1.B.3) adopts the term with a very different sense. Cf. Graham, *Two Chinese Philosophers*, pp. 67–73.

<sup>51</sup> Rosemont, “Against Relativism,” p. 41n11.

<sup>52</sup> I once committed the lexical fallacy myself in an objection (in conversation) against the work of Kwong-loi Shun, who was the first to point out to me that it is not a valid objection.

<sup>53</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, ii.7, *passim*.

she has several words for one concept. Do we speakers of English not have the concept that corresponds to the contemporary Chinese “wǒ 我” because we use two different words that translate it in different contexts: “I” and “me”? Do speakers of contemporary Chinese not have the concept of “million” because they have to use a phrase to express it rather than one lexical item (“bǎi wàn 百萬,” literally “hundred ten-thousands”)? I acknowledge that it indicates *something* when a word in one language does not map neatly onto one word in another language. And in some cases this something can be quite important indeed. But in other cases the lack of one-to-one lexical correspondence may be unimportant. We have to look at the particulars of the two languages being compared in order to determine whether the presence or absence of a particular term is significant.

### I.B.3. *Ruism: Old and New*

Finally, many scholars will object not to the approach I take, but to one I do not take. Some of the most influential interpretive traditions grow out of the work of the Song Dynasty (and later) advocates of *Dào xué* 道學, “School of the Way” (often called “Neo-Confucianism” in English). Brilliant philosophers worked within this broad group of traditions, including the brothers Chéng Yí 程頤 (C.E. 1033–1107) and Chéng Hào 程顥 (1032–1085), Zhū Xī 朱熹 (1130–1200), Lù Xiàngshān 陸象山 (1139–1192), and Wáng Yángmíng 王陽明 (1472–1528). Particularly influential was Zhu Xi’s establishment of a particular educational curriculum based on the *Sìshū* 四書, “Four Books”: the *Greater Learning*, the *Analects* of Kongzi, the *Mengzi*, and the *Mean*.<sup>54</sup> Zhu Xi saw these texts as expressing the same coherent worldview. They (along with Zhu Xi’s elegant *Sìshū jīzhù* 四書集注, *Collected Commentaries on the Four Books*) became the basis for the civil service examinations in China in 1313, and remained so until the examinations were abolished in 1905. Consequently, generations of scholars literally committed the texts cum commentaries to memory. There were many within the tradition who disagreed with Zhu Xi’s interpretation. Indeed, there is a fundamental split between the Cheng-Zhu

<sup>54</sup> See Gardner, *Chu Hsi and the Ta-hsüeh*, idem, *Learning to Be a Sage*, and idem, *Zhu Xi’s Reading of the Analects*. The first book includes a translation of Zhu Xi’s commentary on the *Greater Learning*. Gardner is currently at work on a translation of Zhu Xi’s commentary on the *Analects*, and I am at work on a translation (for Hackett Publishing) of his commentary on the *Mengzi*. For further discussion of the metaphysics and ethics of mature School of the Way Ruism, see my “What Is Living and What Is Dead in the Philosophy of Zhu Xi?”

and Lu-Wang schools of the Study of the Way. But even critics of Zhu Xi often share many of his underlying metaphysical assumptions.<sup>55</sup>

Central to the metaphysics of the “School of the Way” is the view that everything that exists has two aspects: *lǐ* 理 and *qì* 氣. “*Li*” is standardly translated “principle,” but this is misleading because it suggests some individuated and fully verbalizable law. *Li* is perhaps best thought of as *pattern* or *structure*, specifically a structure completely present in each and every thing: each plant has the complete *li* within it, each cat has the complete *li* within it, each human has the complete *li* within her, and each mote of dust has the complete *li* within it. This raises an obvious question: since the structure in each thing is the same, why are things different? The answer is that different endowments of *qi* differentiate kinds and individuate things within kinds. “*Qi*” has been translated in a variety of ways, but none of them is adequate, as no word in English quite corresponds to this concept. *Qi*, for the School of the Way philosophers, is a spontaneously moving “stuff.” It has “extension” and comes in varying degrees of clarity and turbidity, but all of its other properties are determined by the *li*. The greater the clarity of the *qi* of an object, the greater the extent to which the complete *li* manifests itself through that thing. Two otherwise similar rocks are distinguished by having spatially distinct allotments of *qi*. Dogs and humans are distinguished by the comparatively greater clarity of the *qi* of the latter. Furthermore, a wise person is distinguished from a foolish person by the greater clarity of the *qi* of the wise person.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>55</sup> The “Cheng-Zhu” school is based on the interpretation of the Cheng brothers, especially Cheng Yi, and Zhu Xi, whereas the Lu-Wang school follows the teachings of Wang Yangming and Lu Xiangshan.

<sup>56</sup> Here we have a case where the presence of a term in one language (“*qi*” in Chinese) and its absence in another (English) *does* indicate a significant difference. But it is not merely that the term “*qi*” is lacking in English: it is that the theoretical work done in Chinese by “*qi*” is not done by anything in Indo-European thought. *Qi* has some similarities to *matter*, but it would be an error to identify the two. (See Graham, *Two Chinese Philosophers*, pp. 31–43, and Schwartz, *World of Thought in Ancient China*, pp. 179–84.) Of course, the persistence of a common term does not guarantee sameness of meaning. The understanding of *qi* changed over time. In the pre-Qin period, *qi* was merely one constituent of the universe among others. It was only later that *qi* came to be thought of as the fundamental “stuff” of the universe. (See, e.g., the *Huainanzǐ* 淮南子 Chapter 3, translated in Major, *Heaven and Earth in Early Han Thought*.) Graham makes this point: “It was soon to be adapted to cosmology as the universal fluid . . . out of which all things condense and into which they dissolve. But in its older sense, which remains the primary one, it is like such words in other cultures as Greek *pneuma* ‘wind, air, breath.’ It is the energetic fluid which vitalises the body, in particular as the breath, and which circulates outside us as the air.” (Graham, *Disputers*, p. 101.)



All followers of the “School of the Way” agree on the preceding. They also agree that *li* and *qi* are inseparable in reality. It is impossible for *li* to exist without some *qi* to inhere in; it is impossible for *qi* to exist without being structured by the *li*. However, there are some conceptually subtle yet ethically crucial disagreements between the Cheng-Zhu and Lu-Wang factions over the precise relationship between the *li* and the *qi*. The followers of the Cheng-Zhu school hold that, although *li* never exists separately from the *qi* in reality, it is possible, to a certain extent, to conceptually abstract the *li* from its manifestations in the *qi*. Thus, one can specify what the *li* of a father is, what the *li* of a son is, what the *li* of a ruler is, and so on. The classic texts of the Ruist tradition provide us with such partial abstractions of the *li*. These abstractions are not fully accurate since they leave out contextual details that can be crucial. (The way that the *li* of a father manifests itself in my life will not be exactly the way it manifests itself in the life of Kongzi since he and I have sons with different endowments of *qi* and live in societies that manifest the *li* to different extents.) Nonetheless, the abstractions serve an important purpose because most of us have *qi* that is so turbid that we cannot see the *li* within us. An external specification of what the *li* is can help clarify our understanding (and also our *qi*). Consequently, if we study the classic Ruist texts (under the guidance of a wise teacher), we will gradually clarify our *qi* to the point that we are able to trust our own insight into the *li*.

The Lu-Wang school is more radically monistic.<sup>57</sup> They hold that distinguishing *li* and *qi*, even conceptually, will lead to imposing falsifying preconceptions on a reality that is variegated and deeply context-sensitive when it comes to ethics. They also accuse the approach of the Cheng-Zhu school of leading to sterile pedantry, as scholars spend years reading, trying to reach ethical enlightenment, instead of simply acting ethically from the start. Although they acknowledge the human tendency toward selfishness, the followers of Lu-Wang hold that everyone is capable, through his own agency, of piercing the veil of selfishness and recognizing the *li* within himself.

<sup>57</sup> Graham described the Cheng-Zhu school as “dualistic” (*Two Chinese Philosophers*, p. 119ff.). This term suggests something like the Cartesian view of two distinct “substances,” but neither side in the later Ruist debate regards *li* and *qi* as separable substances. Graham recognized this, of course, but I think his choice of terms was misleading. There is even some danger in describing the parties to the debate as “monistic” since they do not deny the reality of “the ten thousand things.” Needless to say, Chan’s terminology of “rationalistic” versus “idealistic” Neo-Confucianism (*Source Book*, p. 518 and passim) is even more misleading.

The factions in the School of the Way were the dominant philosophical movements in China from the Song Dynasty until the forceful encounter with Western ideas following the Opium War of the nineteenth century. Many doctrines (especially Marxism) have been influential since then. However, one of the seminal events in the later history of Ruism was the so-called “New Confucian Manifesto” of 1958. This work called for China to combine the “spirituality” of the Ruist tradition with the democracy, science, capitalism, and technology of the West. New Confucianism continues to be one of the most influential movements in “Greater China.”<sup>58</sup>

New Confucians tend to accept the philosophical history offered by followers of the School of the Way, according to which there is a unique “Way” that was transmitted from the great “sage kings” of antiquity to the Duke of Zhou, to Kongzi, to Kongzi’s disciples, and to Mengzi. This Way was partially forgotten but was recovered by Hǎn Yù 韓愈 (C.E. 768–824) in the Tang Dynasty and propagated by later thinkers such as the Cheng brothers. Consequently, on this view, philosophers such as Zhu Xi (or Wang Yangming, depending on your perspective) are merely transmitting and explicating the very same Way that Kongzi taught.

Most intellectual historians will find any story of this kind suspect.<sup>59</sup> If we know anything about intellectual traditions, it is that they evolve over time. Almost no scholar today would argue that Paul merely explicated the views of Jesus or that Plato merely elaborated the views of Socrates. This does not have to be a bad thing. A tradition can evolve in ways that reflect intellectual maturation and responses to new challenges.<sup>60</sup> But it

<sup>58</sup> The manifesto actually never uses the phrase “New Confucian.” Its proper title is “A Manifesto on Chinese Culture to the World: Our Common Understanding of Chinese Scholarship Research and of the Future of Chinese Culture and World Culture.” (For a translation, see Chang et al., “Manifesto on the Reappraisal of Chinese Culture.”) For samples of contemporary New Confucianism, see Tu, *Centrality and Commonality*, Liu, *Understanding Confucian Philosophy*, and Neville, *Boston Confucianism*. For secondary discussions, see Makeham, *New Confucianism*, which is especially useful for Makeham’s critical discussion of whether there is specific content to being a New Confucian, and Bresciani, *Reinventing Confucianism*, which includes a series of short intellectual biographies of the major New Confucian figures.

<sup>59</sup> This view, too, seems guilty of a sort of cultural essentialism. Although she is primarily concerned with synchronic, rather than diachronic, differences, Narayan’s comments on essentialist accounts are again apt: “They depict as homogenous groups of heterogeneous people whose values, interests, ways of life, and moral and political commitments are internally plural and divergent” (“Essence of Culture and a Sense of History,” p. 82). See also Van Norden, Review of *Understanding Confucian Philosophy*.

<sup>60</sup> This is one of the principal themes of Alasdair MacIntyre’s *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (especially pp. 349–69). See also Pelikan, *Vindication of Tradition*, especially pp. 54–61, and McCarthy, *Crisis of Philosophy*, pp. 331–32.

is simply not plausible that a tradition lasts for two millennia without some substantive conceptual changes. I believe that Ruism is no exception to this generalization.

Later Ruists such as Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming were harsh critics of Buddhism. However, as the Qing Dynasty philosopher-philologist Dai Zhèn 戴震 (C.E. 1723–1777) noted, these Ruists “were in and out of Daoist and Buddhist schools” in their youths, and they were influenced, in ways that they typically did not recognize, by concepts that were originated by Hua-yan and Chan (Zen) Buddhism.<sup>61</sup> For example, the notion of *li* occurs in some early texts, but it hardly seems a central notion: it does not occur at all in the *Analects* of Kongzi, and it occurs in only three passages in the *Mengzi*. Furthermore, in the *Mengzi* passages, there is no reason to think that the term has anything like the metaphysically loaded sense it has for the followers of the School of the Way; rather, the term seems to simply mean “good pattern” or “well-patterned.”<sup>62</sup> In order to find a use of *li* close to that of Zhu Xi, we must look to the famous “Essay on the Golden Lion,” by Fa Zang, the brilliant Buddhist philosopher of the Hua-yan school. In this work, Fa Zang explains *li*, “pattern,” by means of the metaphor of the gold out of which a statue of a lion is formed:

Since the various organs and each and every hair of the lion completely take in the lion by means of the gold, each and every one of them penetrates the whole. The eye of the lion is its ear, its ear is its nose, its nose is its tongue, and its tongue is its body. . . . Thus in each and every hair there are an infinite number of lions, and in addition all the single hairs, together with their infinite number of lions, in turn enter into a single hair.<sup>63</sup>

Fa Zang also uses the image of Indra’s Net, which has a jewel at the intersection of each pair of strands. Each jewel is so bright that it reflects

<sup>61</sup> Dai Zhen, *Mengzi ziyi shuzheng* §10. Whereas Dai Zhen powerfully made this case in the Chinese tradition, David S. Nivison was one of the first to stress this point in Anglophone Sinology (see Nivison, “Can Virtue Be Self-Taught?” pp. 50–51, and “Philosophy of Wang Yangming”). More recently, Nivison’s student Philip J. Ivanhoe has defended this claim (see *Ethics in the Confucian Tradition* and *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation*).

<sup>62</sup> See *Mengzi* 5B1, 6A7, and 7B19. Dai Zhen provides numerous other examples to argue that this is its general sense in early texts (*Mengzi ziyi shuzheng* §1). In challenging the School of the Way vocabulary, I am not committing the “lexical fallacy.” My objection to the School of the Way interpretations is not that the terms “li” and “qi” are rarer in early Ruist texts. Nor is the problem even that these terms are used in new senses by the School of the Way Ruists. My objection is that the School of the Way uses of “li” and “qi” are symptoms of a conceptual scheme that fundamentally distorts earlier Ruism.

<sup>63</sup> Translation by Chan, *Source Book*, pp. 411, 412. For a popular exegesis and defense of Hua-yan metaphysics (from a Vietnamese Zen monk), see Nhat Hanh, *Heart of Understanding*.

every other jewel in the net. This simile represents the way in which every aspect of reality “reflects” every other aspect. Consequently, for Hua-yan Buddhists (and the later Zen Buddhists who followed their lead), *li* is a pattern that interconnects everything in existence and is fully present in each aspect of reality. Their motto is “all is one and one is all.”

This conception of *li* developed as part of a metaphysics in which individual existence is ultimately illusory. This metaphysics, in turn, provides a rational foundation for altruism: if individual existence is illusory, then I have as much reason to help a starving stranger as I do to keep my own hand from injury. The Cheng brothers were attracted to this metaphysics and its corresponding ethics. However, being Ruists, they also held that there are genuine individuals (particular sons who owe filial piety to particular fathers, etc.).<sup>64</sup> Consequently, they wedded the Buddhist notion of *li* to the view (defended by their contemporaries Zhang Zai and Zhou Dunyi) that everything is “condensed” out of *qi*. The result was a powerful and flexible metaphysical theory with important ethical implications. Because of the *li*, the pattern that we all share and are parts of, we have ethical obligations toward others and can fully realize our identities only in relationships with others. But because the *li* must be instantiated in particular allotments of *qi*, with spatio-temporal locations and causal histories, we also have particular obligations (e.g., my debt to *my* teacher, my love for *my* children). However, the School of the Way sees Ruism through Buddhist lenses. In particular, School of the Way Ruists (1) emphasize the metaphysical interconnection of all things. Consequently, they (2) identify virtue with achieving enlightenment about this fact and (3) find the source of wrongdoing in selfishness. These views are fundamentally different from anything the early Ruists thought, so employing them distorts the early texts.

I am concerned that many scholars today are insufficiently critical in their acceptance of School of the Way interpretations of the Ruist classics (and those enshrined in Zhu Xi’s *Collected Commentaries on the Four Books* in particular). This is true even in cases where the influence is unconscious. For example, one philosopher, who prides himself on challenging “the orthodox view,” spends two pages discussing what he calls the “slogan” of Mengzi that “Human nature is *ben*<sup>originally</sup> good.”<sup>65</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Ruist virtues such as *yì* 義, “righteousness,” *zhōng* 忠, “loyalty,” and *xiào* 孝, “filial piety,” seem to require particular individuals since they commit one to “agent-relative restrictions.” (See §II.A in this Introduction for the latter concept, and see Chapter 2, §II.B, for more on these particular virtues.)

<sup>65</sup> Hansen, *Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, p. 79. On the “orthodox” view, see *ibid.*, pp. 5–7.

But Mengzi *never* says xìng běn shàn 性本善 “[Human] nature is originally good.” He says xìng shàn 性善 “[Human] nature is good,” simpliciter. Where has this errant “originally” crept in from? It turns out that “Human nature is originally good” is Zhu Xi’s gloss on what Mengzi means by “Human nature is good.”<sup>66</sup> And, ironically, Zhu Xi’s commentary is as orthodox as one can get. Consequently, to paraphrase Santayana, those who do not learn from the commentaries are doomed to repeat them.

But I come not to bury the School of the Way, just to temper my praise. The Cheng-Zhu and Lu-Wang Ruists were, for all their mistakes, brilliant philosophers and attentive readers. Consequently, while rejecting the School of the Way as a general approach to understanding Kongzi and Mengzi, I will cite them (and Zhu Xi in particular) where their insights have helped or anticipated me. But I will cite them as I would cite any particularly impressive colleague – respectfully but not slavishly.

So far, I have tried to sketch responses to the objections that there was no argument in ancient China, that virtue ethics is a Procrustean framework for interpreting Ruism, and that I am mistaken in failing to follow a School of the Way (“Neo-Confucian”) interpretive framework. In the next two sections of this chapter I shall give “thin” characterizations of virtue ethics and argumentation to set the stage for the detailed analyses in the later chapters of this book.

## II. VIRTUE ETHICS

### II.A. What Is It?

There is disagreement over what precisely virtue ethics is and over whether (and in what way) virtue ethics is distinct from other sorts of normative theory. Virtue ethics is generally contrasted with deontological and consequentialist ethics. However, these other theories can themselves take a variety of forms (and can be combined with each other and with virtue ethics in various ways). For example, a consequentialist can certainly have a view of the virtues and of how to cultivate them, and someone like Aquinas, who has a virtue ethics, can also be a sort of rule-deontologist. (Aquinas held that the Ten Commandments were

<sup>66</sup> Zhu Xi’s gloss is motivated, in part, because he wants to reconcile Mengzi’s statement that all humans have natures that are good with Kongzi’s statement that human natures are merely “close to each other.” See Mengzi 6A6, *Analects* 17:2–3, and Zhu Xi’s commentary on each (*Sishu jizhu*).

exceptionless moral rules, but he thought that only a virtuous person would be willing and able to follow them.) Here, I shall present rough characterizations of consequentialism, deontology, and virtue ethics. Philosophers will notice that I have left out many nuances important to a full understanding of the contemporary Western debates regarding these theories. However, I wish only to sketch the positions with an eye toward illuminating certain aspects of Ruism.

A consequentialist holds that the highest good is a state of affairs that, viewed impersonally, maximizes some property or properties, such as the satisfaction of human preferences or human happiness. Actions (either individual actions or types of actions), institutions, and human characteristics should then be judged by their tendency to maximize this good. The most common Western form of consequentialism is utilitarianism. On one early (and simplistic) formulation, utilitarianism says that we should always perform the action that will produce the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number of people.<sup>67</sup> We shall see that Mohism can be interpreted as a kind of consequentialism, but one that claims that we ought to maximize the goods of wealth, populousness, and social order.

Broadly speaking, a deontologist holds that, sometimes at least, the right action for a particular person to perform may not be the one that maximizes the good, viewed impersonally. Intuitively (and imprecisely), a deontologist claims that the ends do not (always) justify the means. (In contrast, a consequentialist holds that, as long as we are talking about the proper impersonal end, the end does justify the means.) An extreme statement of a deontological point of view is the classic, "Let justice be done though the heavens fall," meaning that (for instance) one may not intentionally kill one innocent person even if the result would be saving thousands of lives. In the West, deontologists are often "rule-deontologists," who hold that what is right and wrong can be captured by ethical rules (e.g., do not kill the innocent). However, deontologists disagree over the significance of moral rules. An "act-deontologist," for instance, holds that there are no exceptionless, nontrivial moral rules.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Bentham himself ultimately expressed dissatisfaction with this formulation. See Troyer, *Classic Utilitarians*, pp. xi–xiii, 92–93.

<sup>68</sup> Act-deontology is the same as radical particularism, a position I discuss in more detail later in this Introduction. My use of the term "deontology" here is very close to that of William Frankena (*Ethics*, pp. 14–17, 23–28, 62–68). However, some philosophers reserve the term "deontology" for what I here call "rule-deontology." I prefer Frankena's

Related to the distinction between consequentialism and deontology is the distinction between “agent-neutral” and “agent-relative” ethical considerations. An “agent-neutral” value has worth from a purely impersonal perspective. For example, everyone in the world having enough food to eat is a state of affairs that has value, regardless of who one is or what one’s own personal goals and projects are. Every person, we might think, has some reason to support efforts to achieve this state of affairs. In contrast, my visiting the pyramids at Giza has “agent-relative” value *for me* – if seeing those pyramids up close once in my life is one of my personal dreams.<sup>69</sup> This value gives *me* reason to act in certain ways. However, *my* visiting the pyramids does not have any real value *for you*, and *you* are under no obligation to do anything to assist me in achieving my goal. Or so it seems, for one of the issues that divides philosophers is whether there are any genuine “agent-relative” ethical considerations. Some philosophers have argued that the only genuine values are agent-neutral values and that the only genuine obligations are those that arise from promoting the agent-neutral values. In contrast, Thomas Nagel offers a catalogue of possible kinds of agent-relative considerations: (1) There are agent-relative *aspirations*, which stem “from the desires, projects, commitments, and personal ties of the individual agent, all of which give him reasons to act in the pursuit of ends that are his own.”<sup>70</sup> My pyramid-visiting example is of this type. Becoming a certain kind of person and living a certain kind of life are aspirations that are especially important for virtue ethics.

(2) Nagel’s category of agent-relative *prohibitions* is illustrated by a famous example from Bernard Williams. Suppose a sadistic dictator has assembled a group of twenty innocent victims whom he plans to kill, but he offers you the following proposition. If *you* will shoot and kill one of the innocent prisoners *yourself*, he will let the other nineteen live. If you

tidy typology because it makes it easier to classify “mixed theories,” like that of Aquinas. As Jean Porter observes, “it would be a mistake to turn to Aquinas for an early example of a moral theorist who offers a theory of virtues *rather than* a theory of rules. . . . Aquinas certainly espouses a morality of rules as well as a morality of virtues” (*Recovery of Virtue*, p. 105, emphasis in original). I also prefer my typology because it brings out what rule-deontology has in common with positions that are neither rule-based nor consequence-based (like W. D. Ross’s ethic of “prima facie duties”). However, I don’t think much turns on how we use these terms, so long as we are clear about them.

<sup>69</sup> The distinction between agent-relative and agent-neutral considerations is different from the debate over ethical relativism and ethical objectivism. For instance, one could hold that ethical truth is relative to each individual person’s point of view but also hold that, from his own point of view at least, there are *no* agent-relative values.

<sup>70</sup> Nagel, *View from Nowhere*, p. 165. My terminology of “aspirations,” “prohibitions,” and “obligations” is related to, but not identical with, that used by Nagel.

decline to shoot one of the prisoners, that man, along with the other nineteen prisoners, will all die. From an agent-neutral perspective, your choice is simply between one innocent person dying and that man *and* nineteen other innocent people dying. Consequently, the obvious thing to do is to bring it about that only one innocent person dies.<sup>71</sup>

However, there may be agent-relative prohibitions, which stem from “reasons for each individual not to maltreat others *himself*, in *his* dealings with them (for example by violating their rights, breaking his promises to them, etc.).”<sup>72</sup> Consequently, one might think that *you* may not kill one innocent person, even if that results in saving nineteen other lives.

Williams’ example may seem hokey. But consider a far from moot example: suppose that a government agent can infiltrate an organized crime syndicate or a terrorist organization only if he proves his reliability by murdering some innocent person. Most deontologists will say that such an action is categorically ruled out, no matter how much good the agent will be able to achieve by performing that action (e.g., saving many other innocent lives once he is able to infiltrate and break up the gang or terrorist group).

A passage from the *Mengzi* illustrates the Ruist commitment to agent-relative prohibitions. One of Mengzi’s disciples suggests that he violate certain ethical principles for the sake of achieving some good consequences, or as the disciple puts it more delicately, “Bend a foot to straighten the yard.” Mengzi responds with an anecdote:

Formerly, Viscount Jian of Zhao sent Wang Liang to drive the chariot for his favorite, Xi. At the end of the day, they had not caught a single bird. Xi reported back that Wang Liang was the worst at his craft in the world. Someone told this to Wang Liang. Liang said, “I ask to try again.” Only after some pressing was he allowed to do so. In one morning, they caught ten birds. Xi reported back, “He is the best at his craft in the world.” Viscount Jian said, “I will have him take charge of driving for you.” When he told Wang Liang, Liang disapproved, saying, “I drove my horses in the prescribed manner for him, and by the end of the day we did not catch one thing. I violated the rules for him, and in one morning we caught ten. . . . I am not accustomed to driving for a petty person. I ask to decline.”

Even the charioteer was ashamed to collude with the archer. Colluding with him to get game, although it be piled as high as a hill, is something he will not do. So how would it be if I were to bend the Way to follow those others? (*Mengzi* 3B1)

<sup>71</sup> Smart and Williams, *Utilitarianism*, pp. 98–100. Williams challenges the “obviousness” of this conclusion.

<sup>72</sup> Nagel, *View from Nowhere*, p. 165. Emphasis mine.



(3) Finally, there are agent-relative “*obligations* we have toward those to whom we are closely related: parents, children, spouses, siblings, fellow members of a community or even a nation.” Ruists stress the obligations created by personal relationships, such as those between ruler and minister, father and son, husband and wife, elder and younger brother, and between friends.<sup>73</sup>

As you might have guessed, many consequentialists believe that the only value is some agent-neutral value and that the only obligation is the agent-neutral one to promote that value. Deontologists, in contrast, recognize, at the least, agent-relative prohibitions. The situation is complicated, though, because just as there is both act-deontology and rule-deontology, so also there is both act-consequentialism and rule-consequentialism. According to rule-consequentialism, the right action to perform is the one sanctioned by a moral code that, if adopted by a society, would maximize utility. So consider Williams’ example of the sadistic dictator who challenges you to murder one innocent person in exchange for his letting nineteen innocent people go free. An act-consequentialist would say that you ought to kill the one innocent person because doing so would save more lives. However, a rule-consequentialist might say that you are prohibited from killing the innocent person because a society that has and follows a rule against killing the innocent will produce better consequences than a society that permits killing the innocent.<sup>74</sup>

How does virtue ethics fit into all this? A helpful oversimplification is that rule-deontological and consequentialist ethics emphasize action, whereas virtue ethics emphasizes becoming a certain sort of person. Because of its emphasis on the ethical agent, virtue ethics generally stresses not only agent-relative prohibitions, but also aspirations and obligations. In addition, as I noted earlier, a virtue ethics has (at least implicitly) four components: (1) an account of what a “flourishing” human life is like, (2) an account of what virtues contribute to leading such a life, (3) an account of how one acquires those virtues, and (4) a philosophical anthropology that explains what humans are like, such that

<sup>73</sup> Nagel, *View from Nowhere*, p. 165. Emphasis mine. (Nagel muddies the water a little since he includes “personal ties” under what I have labeled “aspirations.” I am not sure what kinds of ties Nagel has in mind in the first category that are not included under the third category.) The Ruist relationships mentioned are sometimes called the “five relations” and are mentioned in *The Mean* 20 and in *Mengzi* 3A4 (with “elder and younger” replacing “elder and younger brother” in the latter text).

<sup>74</sup> Brandt, “Some Merits of One Form of Rule Utilitarianism,” defends a rule-consequentialist position and attributes it to John Stuart Mill.

they can acquire those virtues so as to flourish in that kind of life. Virtue ethics can take a variety of forms, ranging from the moderate to the most radical.<sup>75</sup> In its most moderate form, virtue ethics can be seen as a complement to consequentialist or rule-deontological versions of ethics, filling out one of the latter by adding on to it accounts of human virtues, flourishing, cultivation, and philosophical anthropology that are consistent with it. However, in the more moderate versions of virtue ethics, the four components above are logically dependent on consequentialist or deontological aspects of the ethical view. Kant, for example, has a conception of the four items above, but they appear primarily in his seldom-read *The Doctrine of Virtue*, and he thinks of virtues as helping one to follow the deontological strictures of the categorical imperative.

In its most radical formulations, virtue ethics attempts to serve as a foundation for all of ethics and to completely supplant consequentialist and rule-deontological foundations. In a famous essay, G. E. M. Anscombe argued that Western ethics since at least the eighteenth century has been hopelessly muddled and that we cannot begin to think clearly about ethics until we have dropped talk of moral obligation in favor of talk about the virtues. A radical virtue ethicist might hold that we should stop talking about ethical rules or good consequences at all. Alternatively, she might think that, although we may talk about either of these things, in order to know which consequences are good, or what the binding moral rules are, we need to know first what human flourishing, the virtues, and so forth are. For example, Alasdair MacIntyre suggests that, in Aristotle's moral scheme, the ethical "precepts which enjoin the various virtues and prohibit the vices which are their counterparts instruct us . . . how to realize our true nature and to reach our true end," which is human flourishing. Without a conception of human flourishing, the ethical rules or precepts are incoherent.<sup>76</sup>

In between the most moderate and the strongest versions there are a variety of other possibilities. Thomas Aquinas was one of the greatest theorists of the virtues who has ever lived. However, he did not hold the most radical version of virtue ethics. Aquinas, as a Christian, thought

<sup>75</sup> On this distinction, see Baier, "Radical Virtue Ethics."

<sup>76</sup> Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy." MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 52. Michael Slote defends an even more radical version of virtue ethics in his recent *Morals from Motives* (see especially pp. 3–10).

that the Ten Commandments were universally binding moral rules. Consequently, as MacIntyre goes on to explain, the

precepts of ethics now have to be understood not only as teleological injunctions, but also as expressions of a divinely ordained law. . . . To say what someone ought to do is at one and the same time to say what course of action will in these circumstances as a matter of fact lead toward a man's true end and to say what the law, ordained by God and comprehended by reason, enjoins.<sup>77</sup>

Thus, Aquinas was a virtue ethicist who saw ethical rules and human flourishing as perfectly coherent with one another, but he did not see either as conceptually dependent on the other.<sup>78</sup>

The more radical a version of virtue ethics that one holds, the more likely it is that one also holds some version of what is sometimes called the “good person” criterion for right action.<sup>79</sup> In other words, a strong virtue ethicist might claim that one should determine what the right action in a particular context is, not by consulting some moral rule, but rather by asking what a fully virtuous person would do in such a situation. Therefore, strong versions of virtue ethics tend toward particularism.

In current usage, particularism is the view that general moral rules or principles “are at best useless, and at worst a hindrance, in trying to find out which is the right action. What is required is the correct perception of the particular case in hand, with its unique set of properties.”<sup>80</sup> I suggest a terminological reform, though. Let us imagine a spectrum of views, ranging from extreme particularism (the view just defined) at one end of the spectrum to extreme generalism at the other. In the West, utilitarians and rule-deontologists like Kant are generalists. On at least one formulation of utilitarianism, all action is governed by one rule: act so as to maximize happiness. According to Kant there are a number of morally binding maxims. But the categorical imperative demands that we act only in accordance with generalized rules that we could consistently

<sup>77</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 53.

<sup>78</sup> Yuli Liu argues against a virtue ethics interpretation of Ruism in *The Unity of Rule and Virtue*. However, his argument assumes a radical form of virtue ethics and ignores the possibility of hybrid views (like that of Aquinas) that combine accounts of the virtues with rules.

<sup>79</sup> See Yearley, *Mencius and Aquinas*, pp. 14, 71, 202, and 218n26, and Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, pp. 25–42.

<sup>80</sup> McNaughton, *Moral Vision*, p. 190. See also Dancy, “Ethical Particularism and Morally Relevant Properties,” and idem, *Moral Reasons*.

will to be universalized. So we may not lie, says Kant, regardless of the context, and we may not commit suicide to alleviate our suffering, ever. But in between this and radical particularism there are a variety of possible positions on how much guidance general rules provide, how they are supplemented to apply to specific situations, and when (if ever) they can be violated. For example, a more particularistic constraint on lying would be, "Never lie except when to do so is necessary to save a life." A more particularistic rule regarding suicide would be, "Suicide is permissible only to alleviate unrelievable physical suffering so intense that it prevents participation in worthwhile activities." (One might remain unsatisfied with these formulations, but I am using them here just as examples of comparatively particular rules.) Aristotle is a paradigmatic example of a particularist (although not of the most extreme variety). As he famously put it, "among accounts concerning actions, though the general ones are common to more cases, the specific ones are truer, since actions are about particular cases, and our account must accord with these."<sup>81</sup> In the Chinese tradition, the Mohists are the generalists, whereas the Ruists are comparatively particularistic. And the more particularistic a theory is, the more important having the virtues is in being able to determine the appropriate action in a given situation. For example, if we cannot simply follow the rules, we need *wisdom* to guide us in complex and fluid situations. (I'll discuss Ruist particularism and the virtues more in Section II.B.3.b.)

In this section, I have introduced a number of terms that are related in subtle ways, so perhaps an overview is in order. There is a spectrum of ethical views, with the more generalist at one end and the more particularist at the other. A position is generalist to the extent that it holds ethical judgments can be subsumed under highly general (yet substantive) rules; a position is particularist insofar as it holds that only more specific rules give substantive and accurate guidance. Agent-neutral considerations are more general than agent-relative considerations. One can recognize some agent-relative considerations yet have a position that is close to the generalist end of the spectrum. Both consequentialism and rule-deontology are comparatively generalist. However, the more extensive one's commitment to agent-relative aspirations, prohibitions, and obligations the more one is drawn toward particularism. Act-deontology, which is at the extreme particularist end of the spectrum, denies the accuracy of any non-trivial ethical generalizations. The good-person

<sup>81</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 46 (ii.7, 1107a).

criterion is a standard for determining ethically appropriate action in lieu of general rules; it states that one should do what a fully virtuous person would do in the relevant situation. Virtue ethics tends toward the particularist end of the spectrum, but it need not go so far as act-deontology in completely eschewing general rules.

## II.B. The Four Components

Now let's look in more detail at the components of a virtue ethics.

### *II.B.1. Flourishing*

"Flourishing" is a technical term in virtue ethics. To flourish is to live a certain kind of life: a life characterized by the ordered exercise of one's capacities as a human. It is important to see that, although "flourishing" is a technical term in ethics, there is nothing particularly esoteric or parochial about the general notion. (Indeed, the fact that "flourishing" is a technical term for us may reflect, more than anything else, the poverty of contemporary English as a language for discussing virtue ethics.<sup>82</sup> "Flourishing" corresponds to the perfectly ordinary terms "eudaimonia" of Aristotle's Greek and "beatitudo" in Aquinas's Latin.) Most of us at least understand the topic when someone talks about "living the good life." And, whatever philosophical position we pay lip service to, we sometimes act as if we think some ways of life are worth living, whereas others are not. Imagine a person named "Beevis" who spends his life watching only the most mindless of television shows and getting by on the least amount of work and effort possible in all aspects of his life. Beevis does not do anything positively immoral: he does not murder, assault others, or even steal. But he lacks any deep personal relationships, any hobbies, any political commitments, and any challenging intellectual interests. He is not charming or witty or discerning in his tastes. Whatever we may say in an abstract philosophical discussion, we are in fact contemptuous of Beevis and would not wish to be him ourselves or to have anyone we really care about (such as our children) become like him. By saying that

<sup>82</sup> As Stuart Hampshire laments, "Even the word 'virtue' itself now has an archaic and unnatural ring . . ." ("Two Theories of Morality," p. 41). Similarly, Rosalind Hursthouse remarks, "As far as my own linguistic intuitions go, the only virtue term we have which is guaranteed to operate as a virtue term – that is, to pick out something that always makes its possessor good – is 'wisdom.' (Perhaps also 'just' – I am not certain.)" (*On Virtue Ethics*, p. 13).

Beevis is not flourishing, virtue ethics does justice to our intuition that something is deeply lacking in his life.

The claim that flourishing is the “ordered” exercise of one’s capacities reflects the view that some activities are more valuable, or more worthwhile, than others. For instance, running is the exercise of a human capacity. But we agree that, if someone is unable to run, due to birth defect, illness, or injury, she can still lead a “full” or “worthwhile” life. This can be seen as reflecting the assumption that the human capacities exercised in running, though important parts of being a human, are not the most important aspects of being a human. There are other activities (such as engaging in caring relationships with other people) that are of a much higher order.

The notion of flourishing can be generalized to apply to nonhuman animals and even plants. For instance, to flourish as a cat is to live a life characterized by the ordered exercise of one’s capacities as a cat (e.g., hunting, grooming, playing, reproducing). Notice that most cat lovers agree that a cat can lead a very worthwhile life even if it is sterilized; however, few would say that its life is worthwhile if it cannot play. This suggests a pretheoretic sense of the “ordering” of various capacities and activities. The generalizability of the notion of flourishing will be important when we discuss Mengzi, who often uses plant metaphors to explicate human flourishing and cultivation (e.g., *Mengzi* 2A2.16, 2A6, 6A1, 6A7, 6A8).

The classical Western tradition that grows out of Aristotle has examined flourishing in terms of the particular goods that would be achieved by a person living such a life. There are many things that are acknowledged to be goods (e.g., bodily health), or to be goods *if* rightly employed (e.g., wealth), but that are rejected as candidates for the highest good (*summum bonum*): wealth, satisfying one’s sensual desires, physical health, enjoying fame or honor, and power. A short list of goods has been favored by one or another of the major Western virtue ethicists as the highest good: participation in political activity aimed at the good of the community, accumulating theoretical knowledge, contemplating God.<sup>83</sup> We shall see that, although Ruists reject some of the same candidates for the good

<sup>83</sup> On the various candidates, see Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I–II, QQ. 2–3. Participation in political activity seems to be suggested as the highest good by Aristotle in Book I of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and arguably by Cicero (see his *The Dream of Scipio*, p. 344); theoretical knowledge by Plato and by Aristotle in Book X, Chapter 7 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and contemplating God by Aquinas and by Aristotle in the *Eudemian Ethics*. On Aristotle’s complex view, see Nagel, “Aristotle on Eudaimonia,” and Wilkes, “The Good Man and the Good for Man.”

life, they have a conception of flourishing different from that of any of the major Western virtue ethicists: one that emphasizes participation in familial life and in ritual activity.

### *II.B.2. The Virtues*

Virtues are relatively stable dispositions, the possession of which contributes to leading a flourishing life. Virtues will often lead to characteristic actions, but being virtuous is seldom a matter of only external behavior. Virtues are dispositions to think, feel, perceive, *and* act in characteristic ways. A fully benevolent person does not only *act* to help others in distress, she does so out of a concern for their well-being. She is quick to perceive when others need assistance, especially in cases where most of us would be oblivious. She recognizes easily the consequences of her actions for others, and she adjusts her behavior accordingly. She understands the difference between being helpful and being meddlesome, and between generosity and self-abnegation. She often feels compassion for the joys and sorrows of others. (She need not have this emotion every time she acts out of the virtue, though. The classic example is the doctor who would quickly become emotionally exhausted if she allowed herself the luxury of feeling deeply for the suffering of every patient. Still, if a doctor never felt sincere pleasure at seeing a recovered patient leave the hospital, we would think her benevolence was “burnt out.”)<sup>84</sup>

The virtues and flourishing may be related in several ways. On some views, the notion of flourishing is logically primary, and the virtues are defined as those stable dispositions the exercise of which is necessary for a flourishing life. Alternatively, the virtues could be logically prior to flourishing, and a flourishing life would be defined as a life in which the virtues are exercised. In other words, is something a virtue because it enables you to flourish, or does something count as flourishing because it is the exercise of the virtues? Still a third possibility is that the virtues and flourishing are, to some degree at least, conceptually independent.

The qualification that they be “stable” is meant to rule out moods. I may be in a kind mood today, but that does not make me a kind person, or mean that I have the virtue of kindness. Similarly, a genuinely kind person may (in the face of significant stress and exhaustion) be uncharacteristically cold or irritable on occasion. This would not lead us (by itself) to withdraw the judgment that he is kind. On the other hand, we expect that a kind person will generally maintain this trait and will not

<sup>84</sup> My discussion here is indebted to Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, pp. 10–14.

cease to be kind in the face of just any and every difficulty. Virtues can be acquired and lost, though. It is for this reason that ethical cultivation is important.

Western philosophers have proposed various lists of the virtues and have developed an extensive technical vocabulary for discussing them. A “part of a virtue” may be thought of as either an aspect or a specific kind of a given virtue. This is easiest to understand through some commonsense examples. Consider wisdom: a person might be wise in giving advice to others, *or* wise in running her own household, *or* wise in leading others. In turn, wisdom in giving advice to others might be thought of as having many aspects: judging the character (maturity, honesty, etc.) of the persons the advice will affect, recognizing the difference between helping and meddling, being able to find the proper tone in which to put something, spotting potential conflicts of interest that may bias one’s own advice, and so forth. Each of these could be thought of as a “part” of the virtue of “wisdom in giving advice to others.”<sup>85</sup>

Understanding the notion of parts of virtues helps one to understand the notion of the “cardinal virtues.” The “cardinal virtues” are either the virtues that are significantly more important than any other virtues, or they are the virtues that encompass all the other virtues. In the *Republic*, Plato listed four cardinal virtues: wisdom, justice, courage, and moderation. Every other virtue, Plato thinks, is a “part” of one of these virtues. Later in the Christian tradition, a passing comment by the Apostle Paul was interpreted as suggesting a list of three cardinal virtues: “And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity” (I Corinthians 13:13 KJV). Thomas Aquinas, the great synthesizer, combined the two lists, saying that there are four “natural” virtues (those named by Plato) and three “infused” virtues (those referred to by Paul, which are given by the Grace of God).<sup>86</sup>

It is not clear whether Kongzi had a list of cardinal virtues. His later follower Mengzi did, though: benevolence, righteousness, wisdom, and propriety. To these, Ruists of the Han and later dynasties added a fifth: faithfulness. We shall explore the Ruist accounts of the virtues in detail in later chapters. However, as we can see, the Ruist and Thomistic

<sup>85</sup> Aquinas, *Summa* II–II, Q. 48. Aquinas distinguishes between “integral,” “subjective,” and “potential” parts. We need not do so for our purposes in this book, but see Yearley, *Mencius and Aquinas*, pp. 29–30.

<sup>86</sup> On “cardinal virtues,” see Aquinas, *Summa* I–II, Q. 61, especially Art. 2. “Charity,” of course, is the King James Bible’s translation of the Greek *agapê*, which means “love.” Cf. Yearley, *Mencius and Aquinas*, pp. 29–31.



lists differ substantially. This raises many interesting questions (most of which would not occur to us were we not using the virtue ethics framework). For instance, how do the differences in the lists of virtues reflect differences in their respective conceptions of human flourishing? *Why* did Mengzi and many later Ruists regard these virtues as comprehensive? Thinking about what the “parts” of the Ruist virtues are may help us answer the latter question and help us spot deep similarities between two virtues that had been masked by surface differences.

We find that both Western and Ruist virtue ethics distinguish between genuine virtues, on the one hand, and their “counterfeits” and “semblances,” on the other.<sup>87</sup> Both semblances and counterfeits speciously resemble genuine virtues. However, in the case of a paradigmatic counterfeit of a virtue, one consciously acts in an apparently virtuous fashion out of an ulterior motive. A politician who feigns a good marriage to obtain the support of the voters has a counterfeit of one or more virtues. In the case of a semblance, no intentional deception is involved. A semblance is a relatively stable disposition that, although it results in superficially virtuous behavior (and perhaps even, to some extent, virtuous perception, thinking, and feeling), nonetheless lacks some part of the full virtue. Some semblances have names. Thus, I am “rash,” not courageous, if I rush in to face great danger for the sake of minor or illusory goods. (Perhaps I sign up to fight in a war, not because I believe in the cause or because I feel that I have a duty to my country, but just because I want a “red badge of courage.”) Rashness is a semblance of courage that lacks a part of the virtue: proper judgment regarding what is truly valuable and what is a reasonable risk.

The line between a semblance and a counterfeit can sometimes be hard to draw, though, because of the phenomenon of self-deception. Dorian Gray, near the bottom of the pit of decadence, believes that he has turned toward a “new life” by declining to seduce an innocent girl. He goes to inspect the portrait that reveals his sins, hoping to see some positive change, however small:

A cry of pain and indignation broke from him. He could see no change, save that in the eyes there was a look of cunning, and in the mouth the curved wrinkle of the hypocrite. . . . Then he trembled. Had it been merely vanity that had made him do this one good deed? Or the desire for a new sensation, as Lord Henry had hinted, with his mocking laugh? Or that

<sup>87</sup>Yearley, *Mencius and Aquinas*, pp. 19–23. Technically speaking, virtues and semblances are different kinds of *dispositions*, whereas a counterfeit is a kind of intentional *action* (or series of actions).

passion to act a part that sometimes makes us do things finer than we are ourselves? Or, perhaps, all of these? . . . Vanity? Curiosity? Hypocrisy? Had there been nothing more in his renunciation than that? There had been something more. At least he thought so. But who could tell? . . . No. There had been nothing more. Through vanity he had spared her. In hypocrisy he had worn the mask of goodness. For curiosity's sake he had tried the denial of self. He recognised that now.<sup>88</sup>

To choose not to bed a guileless maid is a counterfeit of virtue if one does it just to see what it feels like to deny oneself sex. But Dorian Gray's action is on the borderline between counterfeit and semblance. The look in the eyes and the appearance of the mouth of his portrait suggest that, at some level, he knew what his true motives were. However, his shock when he sees the portrait shows that he was not fully conscious of his own true intentions. Consequently, Yearley is correct in suggesting, not a sharp division, but rather "a spectrum with counterfeit virtues and real virtues at either end and semblances of virtue in the middle."<sup>89</sup>

The concepts of counterfeits and semblances illuminate some passages in Ruist texts. A paradigmatic demonstration of sagely Virtue in ancient China was for a king to step down and relinquish the throne to someone else (thereby showing his humility and lack of attachment to the prerogatives of rulership). Mengzi observes that this practice can be abused by a counterfeit of virtue. However, he also thinks that counterfeits are likely to be found out: "If one is fond of making a name for oneself, one may be able to relinquish a state that can field a thousand chariots. But if one is just not that kind of person, relinquishing a basket of rice or a bowl of soup would show in one's face" (7B11). And how else can we understand Mengzi's reference to "the propriety that is not propriety" and "the righteousness that is not righteousness" (4B6) except as comments on either semblances or counterfeits of propriety and righteousness? Furthermore, the discussion of the "village worthies" is quite lucid when understood as a discussion of semblances:

Kongzi said, "I hate that which seems but is not. I hate weeds out of fear that they will be confused with grain. I hate cleverness out of fear that it will be confused with righteousness. I hate glibness out of fear that it will be confused with trustworthiness. . . . I hate the village worthies, out of fear that they will be confused with those who have Virtue." (*Mengzi* 7B37.12; cf. *Analects* 17.13)

<sup>88</sup> Wilde, *Picture of Dorian Gray*, pp. 254–55. (Last ellipsis in original.)

<sup>89</sup> Yearley, *Mencius and Aquinas*, p. 19. For a suggestive discussion of hypocrisy that draws on both Chinese and Western philosophy, see Kupperman, "Falsity, Psychic Indefiniteness, and Self Knowledge."

Characteristic of many Western accounts is the doctrine of the “unity of the virtues.” At its most extreme, this doctrine holds that, in order to have any one of the virtues, it is necessary to have all of them. Stated this baldly, the view seems difficult to accept, although it has had notable defenders. Part of the reason for the disunity of the virtues is that humans (due to complex psychological causes) sometimes have highly selective conceptual “blind spots” and narrow dysfunctional habits. Nonetheless, it certainly is true that many virtues are interrelated. If wisdom involves an understanding of the relative values of goods, then courage can be present only to the extent that we also have wisdom, for without wisdom, courage becomes rashness. Similarly, if we think of prudence as a healthy concern for one’s own well-being, then generosity is impossible without it, for the presence of prudence is part of what distinguishes generosity from one of its semblances – codependence.

Did any Ruists believe in the unity of the virtues? Zhu Xi argues explicitly that all virtues are, ultimately, manifestations of benevolence. This entails the unity of the virtues. It is hard to say what Kongzi’s own view was, but he does seem confident in attributing some virtues to individuals without attributing others: “Those who are Good will necessarily display courage, but those who display courage are not necessarily Good” (14.4).<sup>90</sup>

### *II.B.3. Ethical Cultivation and Philosophical Anthropology*

A philosopher’s account of ethical cultivation and her philosophical anthropology are typically closely related because how one becomes ethical depends very much on what the capacities, traits, and dispositions of humans are.

II.B.3.A. THREE MODELS. Broadly speaking, we can distinguish three models of the process of ethical cultivation: discovery, re-formation, and development.<sup>91</sup> According to a discovery model, each human has innately and completely whatever cognitive and affective capacities are required for full virtue (be it knowledge, or certain dispositions, or some true nature). All that is necessary is for each of us to discover this source of virtue within ourselves and apply it. According to a re-formation model,

<sup>90</sup> MacIntyre notes the relevance of 14.4 to the issue of the unity of the virtues (“Incommensurability, Truth, and the Conversation between Confucians and Aristotelians about the Virtues,” pp. 106–7). For Zhu Xi’s view, see Zhu Xi, *Sishu jizhu*, commentary on *Mengzi* 2A7, and *Zhuzi yulei* 1:107ff.

<sup>91</sup> I borrow this typology, with modifications, from Ivanhoe, *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation*, pp. 17–18, 32–33, 59–60, 101–2; Schofer, “Virtues in Xunzi’s Thought,” pp. 71–72; and Yearley, *Mencius and Aquinas*, pp. 59–61.

in contrast, each of us must undergo some fundamental transformation to create in us whatever knowledge, dispositions, or nature is required for virtue. Finally, according to a development model, each person innately has incipient tendencies toward virtue that must develop in order for the person to achieve full virtue.

Suppose, for example, that Biff is currently uninterested in the well-being of others. In his personal life, he ignores the needs of others in pursuing what he wants, and he is indifferent or hostile toward broad social movements aimed at helping others. What kind of transformation would Biff have to undergo in order to become a better person? Different models will offer different answers. One type of discovery model might say the following. Biff already has benevolent motivations. However, he is unaware of facts about other people and the world that would trigger his benevolence. Making him aware of these facts is simply a matter of getting him to use his ability to engage in scientific, logical, and means-end reasoning. Biff needs to understand better the logical consequences of the principles that he is committed to, empirical facts about the world, the causal consequences of various courses of action, and so forth. Consequently, getting Biff to write a research paper on, say, world hunger would make him aware of, and hence sympathetic toward, the suffering of people in the Third World. Because of the channeling of Biff's preexistent motivations, his new knowledge would influence how much he gives to charity, how he votes, and so on. On this model, all that is necessary for Biff's moral development is for him to use the capacities he already possesses.

In contrast, according to one kind of re-formation model, Biff's innate motivations are amoral. He craves things like food and sex, and he isn't particularly concerned how he gets them. However, if Biff gets positive reinforcement for moral behavior, and negative reinforcement for immoral behavior, he will learn to take joy in the happiness of others and be saddened by the suffering of others. This conditioning process will produce sympathetic motivations in him that did not exist before. According to this model, the key to making Biff a better person is putting him in an environment that reshapes him by rewarding or punishing the appropriate kinds of behavior.

Finally, one sort of developmental model would say that Biff (like all humans) was born with some sympathy for others. However, this sympathy has to be nurtured in order for Biff to develop his full moral potential. The process of nurturing must engage the sympathy that Biff already has but also gradually lead it on so that it is manifested more broadly

and more deeply. As such, it is a process that involves both cognitive and emotional growth on Biff's part. This sort of model is more likely than the other two to use imaginative literature to cultivate Biff's sympathy because such literature simultaneously engages one's perception, thinking, and feeling.

These are not, by any means, the only forms that discovery, re-formation, and development models can take. I present them here only as illustrative examples (and very sketchy ones at that). But we can already see that each model presents philosophical puzzles. The discovery model might make ethical cultivation seem too easy: if only the Biffs of the world were as easy to transform as *that*! The re-formation model might seem unworkable or unappealing, or both: will reconditioning change how people actually feel, or just change how they act (in public)? And why should I allow myself to be reconditioned? The development model may seem attractive, but how do we cultivate innate tendencies in a manner that does not end up being just discovery or re-formation? We shall go on to explore, here and in later chapters, the details of specific versions of each model.

Those familiar with the Chan (Zen) Buddhist tradition may be tempted to misinterpret this trichotomy in terms of the debate between "sudden enlightenment" and "gradual enlightenment." Chan Buddhists all have discovery models of cultivation: the object of cultivation is to fully realize one's "Buddha nature," which is present in each of us. However, the manner in which this realization occurs can be conceived of as either sudden or gradual. The sudden view became the orthodoxy: although it may take years to happen, if it happens at all, an enlightenment experience must be instantaneous and complete.<sup>92</sup> The alternative view was that enlightenment could happen, bit by bit, over a long period of time. It might be tempting to identify this second view with a development model in contrast to the discovery model of the sudden view. However, both the sudden and gradual views are instances of the discovery model since in each case one is simply discovering what is already present within oneself. But one could (generally speaking) discover what is in oneself suddenly or gradually. This is important to understand because it helps

<sup>92</sup> See Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism*, vol. 1, pp. 107–21 on the sudden/gradual debate. See *ibid.*, pp. 142–48 on "Buddha nature." As I point out in the next paragraph, a philosophy of cultivation typically emphasizes one model but also incorporates aspects of other models as secondary features. Sudden-enlightenment Chan incorporated gradual-enlightenment aspects in practices such as meditation, study, and interviews with the master.

illuminate the distinction between particular kinds of discovery models. For example, Chan Buddhists and School of the Way Ruists both have discovery models of self-cultivation. However, the Chan tradition came to emphasize sudden enlightenment, whereas the School of the Way came to emphasize (especially in the Cheng-Zhu wing) a kind of gradual discovery of one's true nature.

I hazard the broad generalization that every normative ethical theory at least implicitly takes as its paradigm one of the three models. However, there are perhaps no pure instances of any of the three types. A philosophy of cultivation will emphasize one model, but it will also incorporate aspects of other models as secondary features. Mengzi emphasized a developmental model of cultivation. According to him, humans are born with incipient virtuous dispositions that require cultivation in order to develop into complete virtues. For example, Mengzi claims that all humans are born with some compassion for the suffering of others. This compassion is what leads any human to have a feeling of "alarm and compassion" at the sight of a child about to fall into a well (2A6). However, we frequently fail to manifest this compassion toward other kinds of suffering. We need to "fill out" our innate compassion so that it extends to other people. (Exactly how we are to go about "filling out" our innate reactions is a challenging question to which we shall return in Chapter 4, §IV.) Although this is primarily a developmental picture, there are also aspects of a discovery model in Mengzi's view. He thinks that many of us are unaware that we even have incipient virtuous inclinations within us. Thus, Mengzi explains to King Xuan of Qi that the compassion the king showed by sparing an ox being led to slaughter shows that he has the capacity to be benevolent toward his own subjects. Mengzi helps the king discover that he has virtuous dispositions within himself (1A7.4–10).<sup>93</sup>

Xúnzǐ 荀子 (the next major Ruist after Mengzi) rejects the notion that humans have incipient tendencies toward compassion, righteousness, or other virtuous reactions. Instead, Xunzi uses a re-formation model of cultivation. Whereas, according to Mengzi, human virtuous dispositions are like the sprouts of plants whose growth must be nurtured, according to Xunzi, transforming a natural human being into a virtuous person is like steaming and bending a straight piece of wood until it becomes a circular wagon-wheel. However, as Donald Munro and Eric Hutton have pointed out, there are also developmental aspects to Xunzi's view

<sup>93</sup> The fact that *Mengzi* 1A7 reveals a discovery aspect to a philosophy that is characterized overall by a development model is, I think, part of what has made this passage so puzzling and intriguing for commentators.

of cultivation. For instance, Xunzi acknowledges that humans innately care for their own kin.<sup>94</sup> However, he does not regard this as a virtuous inclination since such concern can lead to vicious action unless it is re-shaped by ethical habituation. (My innate love of my own kin might lead me to thoughtlessly and selfishly harm others to benefit my own parents or children.) Consequently, our innate concern for our own kin must be re-formed so that it becomes the virtue of filial piety. (Compare Aristotle's comments on "natural virtues," cited later in this section.)

In contrast with both Mengzi and Xunzi, Chinese Buddhists and philosophers of the School of the Way favored discovery models of cultivation. Although they disagreed over what one discovered, Buddhists and School of the Way Ruists believed that the key event in ethical cultivation was coming to discover one's true nature. For the Ruists, this human nature is the *lǐ* 理 ("principle" or "pattern"), which links each thing to everything else in the universe. This true nature is typically hidden, in most of us, by selfish inclinations.

Zhu Xi and his followers supplemented the discovery view with aspects of both the development and re-formation models. Recall that Zhu Xi thinks that the *qì* 氣 of most of us is so turbid that we cannot, initially, see the *lǐ*. Consequently, it is best to begin by teaching children the "lesser learning," which re-forms their selfish, disordered inclinations:

At the age of eight, all the male children, from the sons of kings and dukes to the sons of commoners, entered the school of lesser learning; there they were instructed in the chores of cleaning and sweeping, in the formalities of polite conversation and good manners, and in the refinements of ritual, music, archery, charioteering, calligraphy, and mathematics.<sup>95</sup> At the age of fifteen, the Son of Heaven's eldest son and other imperial sons on down to the eldest legitimate sons of dukes, ministers, high officials, and officers of the chief grade, together with the gifted among the populace, all entered the school of greater learning.<sup>96</sup>

In the greater learning, one studies (under the guidance of a wise teacher) the classic texts of the sages (primarily the *Four Books*, referred

<sup>94</sup> See Xunzi 19, "Discourse on Ritual," in *Readings*, p. 283, Munro, "A Villain in the Xunzi," and Hutton, "Does Xunzi Have a Consistent Theory of Human Nature?" (The English-language literature on Xunzi is blossoming. See, for example, Kline and Ivanhoe, *Virtue, Nature and Agency in the Xunzi*, and Goldin, *Rituals of the Way*.)

<sup>95</sup> These are sometimes referred to as "the six arts."

<sup>96</sup> Gardner, *Chu Hsi and the Ta-hsüeh*, pp. 79–80. Since the lesser learning emphasizes training in good habits and developing skills, I take it to be a kind of re-formation. However, it is possible that Zhu Xi saw these activities as developing innate tendencies too.

to earlier). The aim of this study is to produce an ethically transformative understanding:

It would seem that every man's intellect is possessed of knowledge and that every thing in the world is possessed of principle. But, to the extent that principle is not yet thoroughly probed, man's knowledge is not yet fully realized. Hence, the first step of instruction in greater learning is to teach the student, whenever he encounters anything at all in the world, to build upon what is already known to him of principle and to probe still further, so that he seeks to reach the limit. After exerting himself in this way for a long time, he will one day become enlightened and thoroughly understand [principle]; then, the manifest and the hidden, the subtle and the obvious qualities of all things will all be known, and the mind, in its whole substance and vast operations, will be completely illuminated.<sup>97</sup>

Although one is, for Zhu Xi, only discovering knowledge by “probing” the principles that are already present in both one's mind and in things so that they will become “illuminated,” his language also suggests (“to build upon what is already known to him”) a development of an incipient awareness. Consequently, Zhu Xi had a discovery model, but he also thought that the “lesser learning” of youth involved re-formation and that the “greater learning” involved some development of knowledge already possessed.

In contrast, the followers of Lu Xiangshan and Wang Yangming had an almost pure discovery model of cultivation. Wang said that all people already have complete access to their true nature. Working at *becoming* a virtuous person, in the manner that Zhu Xi suggests, is a distraction from simply *being* a virtuous person by listening to the guidance of one's innate moral sense. Wang adopted (and unintentionally adapted) a phrase from Mengzi, liáng zhì 良知, “pure knowing,” to refer to this ethical sense. For Wang, to discover *liang zhi* is both necessary and sufficient for virtuous action.<sup>98</sup>

In summary, Mengzi has a developmental view with secondary discovery aspects, Xunzi has a re-formation view with developmental aspects,

<sup>97</sup> Gardner, *Chu Hsi and the Ta-hsüeh*, p. 105. (Gloss in brackets is by Gardner.) Gardner has “It would seem that every man's intellect is possessed of the capacity for knowing . . .,” but the Chinese text literally says, “It would seem that every man's intellect is possessed of knowing” (or “knowledge”). I think this is precisely what Zhu Xi (with his discovery model) wants to say, so I have modified Gardner's translation slightly.

<sup>98</sup> In its locus classicus, *Mengzi* 7A15, *liang zhi* refers to “best knowledge,” which presumably contrasts with amoral cleverness (*Mengzi* 4B26). However, Wang uses the term to refer to an understanding that is uncontaminated by selfish desires. Consequently, when discussing Wang, I prefer Nivison and Ivanhoe's functional translation, “pure knowing” (see Ivanhoe, *Ethics in the Confucian Tradition*, pp. 48–50).



Wang Yangming has an almost pure discovery model, and Zhu Xi has a discovery model with both re-formation and developmental aspects. Because the School of the Way Ruists assumed a discovery model of cultivation, it was difficult for them to fully understand the earlier Ruism of Mengzi and Xunzi.<sup>99</sup> For example, Mengzi repeatedly uses agricultural metaphors to describe the process of ethical cultivation. These metaphors are hardly rhetorical window dressing. They are strikingly appropriate for his developmental model. However, they are not particularly apt metaphors for a discovery model. (The farmer does not *discover* full-grown plants; he *develops* them from their incipient forms.) Thus, as Philip J. Ivanhoe points out, Zhu Xi is led to a complicated misreading of Mengzi. In a famous thought experiment, Mengzi argues that any human would have a feeling of “alarm and compassion” if he suddenly saw a child about to fall into a well (*Mengzi* 2A6). Mengzi refers to this reaction as the duān 端, “sprout,” of benevolence. The implication is that we must carefully cultivate this sprout so that it grows into the full virtue (cf. *Mengzi* 2A2 and 6A7). However, Zhu Xi glosses *duan* as xù 緒, “tip,” and paraphrases what he takes to be Mengzi’s point by saying, “It is like when there is a thing inside something but the tip is visible outside.”<sup>100</sup>

Although the cultivation typology was developed to explicate Chinese (and especially Ruist) ethics, it can also help us see Western ethical theories in a new light.<sup>101</sup> Plato’s key model is discovery. Each human being, he believes, is born with complete knowledge of the Forms, those perfect, eternal paradigms of Triangularity, Humanity, Beauty, Justice, and so on. However, when we are embodied, the desires and misleading impressions of our physical senses cause us to partially forget and ignore our genuine knowledge. Philosophical education is aimed at facilitating recollection, the rediscovery of what we have always known. Nonetheless, Plato’s ethics also includes elements of a development model since one must gradually develop the capacity to see the Forms by training the parts

<sup>99</sup> Interestingly, although Dai Zhen (see §I.B.3) was an insightful critic of the School of the Way, he too assumed a discovery model of cultivation, and this led him to misread Mengzi in certain ways. For Dai Zhen, our natural inclinations are fixed. Ethics is a matter of discovering what we ought to do by testing our inclinations against a reversibility test: “Do not impose upon others what you yourself do not desire” (*Analects* 15.24). See Dai, *Mengzi ziyi shuzheng* §§5–8. (On *Analects* 15.24, which gives this reversibility test as a characterization of the term shù 恕, see also my Chapter 2, §I.B.1.)

<sup>100</sup> Zhu Xi, *Sishu jizhu*, commentary on *Mengzi* 2A6. (I discuss *Mengzi* 2A6 in much more detail in Chapter 4, §III.) Cf. Ivanhoe, *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation*, pp. 46, 56n15.

<sup>101</sup> For a different but very insightful comparison of Chinese and Western views on human nature and ethical cultivation, see Schwitzgebel, “Human Nature and Moral Development.”

of one's nature that pull one away from them and toward the material world. In common with Aristotle and Zhu Xi, Plato has much to say about the education of youth, or what he called "*paideia*" (and which Zhu Xi called "lesser learning"). Interestingly, this distinguishes them from the early Ruists and from most modern Western philosophers, who say little on this topic.<sup>102</sup> Plato suggests that education and cultivation begin with physical education and "music" in youth. In adulthood, one moves on to the study of arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and harmonics – the quadrivium of later medieval education.

Aristotle takes as his paradigm a re-formation model: "the virtues arise in us neither by nature nor against nature, but we are by nature able to acquire them, and reach our complete perfection through habit."<sup>103</sup> In other words, the process of becoming virtuous does not exploit any innate knowledge or virtuous dispositions we have. Rather, we must be habituated to virtue by being made to perform virtuous actions: "we become just by doing just actions, temperate by doing temperate actions, brave by doing brave actions."<sup>104</sup> This may sound superficially like Mengzi's view, but it is actually closer to Xunzi's, for Aristotle thinks that the beginner in ethical cultivation does not do virtuous actions "in the way in which just or temperate people do them."<sup>105</sup> Specifically, the beginner does not yet love virtue for its own sake, nor does he act out of a settled state of character.<sup>106</sup> Perhaps Aristotle's advice for becoming virtuous is similar to that which Hamlet gives to Queen Gertrude:

Assume a virtue, if you have it not.  
That monster custom, who all sense doth eat,  
Of habits devil, is angel yet in this,  
That to the use of actions fair and good  
He likewise gives a frock or livery  
That aptly is put on. Refrain tonight,  
And that shall lend a kind of easiness  
To the next abstinence, the next more easy;  
For use almost can change the stamp of nature,  
And entertain the devil or throw him out  
With wondrous potency.<sup>107</sup>

<sup>102</sup> Nivison, "Paradox of Virtue," p. 37. This may reflect the belief that early childhood was not an important time for ethical conditioning, but Kupperman suggests several alternative explanations for why Kongzi seems to have ignored this topic. See Kupperman, *Learning from Asian Philosophy*, p. 37.

<sup>103</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, pp. 33–34 (ii.1, 1103a).

<sup>104</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 34 (ii.1, 1103a–b).

<sup>105</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 40 (ii.4, 1105b).

<sup>106</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, ii.4.

<sup>107</sup> *Hamlet*, III.iv.160–70.

However, there is some obscurity about how Aristotle conceives habituation as operating. If, as Aristotle seems to suggest, we are not born with even incipient virtuous inclinations, how is it possible that repeated performance of behavior that is “virtuous” transforms us so that we have the right motivations and can act in a way that is genuinely virtuous? Aristotle says that youth need to be “steered by the rudder of pleasure and pain.” In view of this comment, Kupperman suggests that “Our more mature delight and pain are the result of childhood management (by parents and others) of pleasure and pain, which in a rather Pavlovian manner establishes predispositions to feel pleasure and pain at certain things or thoughts.” We thus develop a “habit of associating incontinent or antisocial behavior with pain,” and virtuous behavior with pleasure.<sup>108</sup>

There are also developmental aspects in Aristotle’s view, though, since he speaks of “natural virtues”: “For each of us seems to possess his type of character to some extent by nature, since we are just, brave, prone to temperance, or have another feature, immediately from birth.” But the so-called “natural virtues” are not virtues, properly speaking: “For these natural states belong to children and to beasts as well [as to adults], but without understanding they are evidently harmful.” Rather, these dispositions, at most, facilitate the re-formation required to possess the relevant virtues.<sup>109</sup>

The development/discovery/re-formation trichotomy is relevant to some observations that Alasdair MacIntyre has made about the history of Western ethics since the Enlightenment. As MacIntyre notes, one of the defining features of the Enlightenment was “the scientific and philosophical rejection of Aristotelianism.” In particular, according to “the conception of reason at home in the most innovative seventeenth-century philosophy and science,” reason “does not comprehend essences or transitions from potentiality to act; these concepts belong to the despised conceptual scheme of scholasticism.”<sup>110</sup> Typical of this Enlightenment attitude is Molière’s brutal parody of scholastic science in his *Le Malade Imaginaire*. A pompous scholastic doctor, Monsieur Diafoirus, praises his son by observing, “above all else, what pleases me in him is that, following my example, he attaches himself blindly to the opinions of the ancients, and that he has never desired to listen to or understand the reasonings and experiments of the pretended discoveries of our century, concerning

<sup>108</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 266 (x.1, 1172a20). Kupperman, *Learning from Asian Philosophy*, pp. 37, 38.

<sup>109</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 170 (vi.13–14, 1144b). (Gloss in brackets is by Irwin.)

<sup>110</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 54.

the circulation of the blood and other opinions of like nature.”<sup>111</sup> Although we chuckle at Diafoirus, we should (in fairness to Aristotle) keep in mind Jaroslav Pelikan’s comment: “By constructing his telescope and using it to observe empirically, Galileo was a more faithful Aristotelian than were those who quoted Aristotle’s *Physics* against his observations.”<sup>112</sup> Be that as it may, Molière goes on to portray a successful candidate for a doctorate “explaining” why opium puts people to sleep by stating that it has a “virtus dormitiva,” a sleeping power, whose “natura” is to put the senses to sleep. Aristotelian explanations in terms of potentiality are here caricatured as psuedo-explanations.<sup>113</sup>

However, if one rejects the notion of potentiality, one must also reject a development model of cultivation, for what one develops according to such a model is precisely a sort of potential. Consequently, almost all the major ethicists we find in the West after the Enlightenment have either a discovery or a re-formation model of ethical development.<sup>114</sup> If we wish to employ a re-formation model, we must have a standard independent of human nature by which to measure its improvement. God and revealed religion are one possible source of such a standard. So the major philosophers who use a re-formation model tend to be religious ethicists who are, broadly, in the Augustinian tradition. St. Augustine and those who follow him hold that human nature was so severely corrupted by the Fall of Adam and Eve that we are incapable of virtue or the most important kinds of knowledge without having our natures re-formed by the Grace of God. As is the case with the other thinkers we have examined, Augustine supplements his primary model with elements of other models. Augustine holds that all humans innately love God and seek God. However, without God’s Grace, it is impossible for us to discover that God is what we want and need, so we mistakenly seek satisfaction in God’s creations: wealth, power, and human bodies. Pascal, although he has somewhat

<sup>111</sup> Molière, *Hypochondriac*, II.5, p. 235.

<sup>112</sup> Pelikan, *Vindication of Tradition*, p. 16.

<sup>113</sup> Molière, *Le Malade Imaginaire*, Third Intermezzo.

<sup>114</sup> Aristotle would distinguish between a passive potentiality (my potential to read Latin before I have begun to study it) and an active potentiality (my potential to read Latin after I have learned it). Even on a re-formation view, humans must have a passive potentiality for virtue. But on a developmental view, humans have by nature a combination of active and passive potentialities for virtue. Aristotle has a re-formation model that recognizes a passive potential for virtue. We should distinguish a third option: a “damaged potential,” which must be *transformed* to become virtuous, as by supernatural Grace. It is this third kind of potential that many modern critics of the Enlightenment have used as the basis of their re-formation model.

more confidence in the power of human reason, is an example of an Enlightenment thinker who is in this Augustinian tradition.<sup>115</sup>

Without being able to appeal to an independent theological standard to justify re-formation, secular Western philosophers since the Enlightenment have tended toward discovery models. Not only that, but they have almost all used a discovery model with little if any developmental aspects. David Hume, in the eighteenth century, and G. E. Moore, in the twentieth, illustrate this trend. Hume and Moore are not only widely separated in time, but they also have very different philosophical views on many topics. Hume is a moral anti-realist; he thinks that there are no objective moral facts. Moore is a paradigmatic objectivist about morality. But, for both, morality is a matter of simply discovering something. For Hume, we discover what our own “passions” are. For Moore, we discover what our moral intuition reveals to us is objectively good.<sup>116</sup> Both have almost nothing to say about how we might develop or cultivate an improved sensibility that would allow us to more easily, or more frequently, discover what we need to discover.<sup>117</sup> This is quite problematic because the fact is that we do not all discover the same things when we look – regardless of whether we are looking at our passions or at the

<sup>115</sup> For more on Augustine, see Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, Van Norden, “Mencius and Augustine,” and Stalnaker, *Overcoming Our Evil*. Interestingly, David Nivison sees similarities between “Pascal’s wager” and aspects of Xunzi’s thought (“Xunzi on ‘Human Nature,’” p. 210). Of course, as Nivison recognizes, there are many important differences between Xunzi’s and Pascal’s philosophies, but what structural similarities there are may be related to the fact that each has a re-formation model of ethical cultivation.

<sup>116</sup> Compare Hume, *Treatise*, Book III, and Moore, *Principia Ethica*. H. A. Prichard is another example of a philosopher with an almost pure discovery model. He states that if we are unsure about what our obligation is, the “only remedy lies in actually getting into a situation which occasions the obligation . . . and then letting our moral capacities of thinking do their work” (“Does Moral Philosophy Rest on a Mistake?” p. 47). He does note in passing that this is “only possible for a developed moral being, and that different degrees of development are possible” (*ibid.*, p. 43n7). However, the meat of a development model is concerned with precisely how one becomes a “developed moral being,” about which Prichard says nothing.

<sup>117</sup> I must qualify this statement. In his seldom-read essay, “The Sceptic,” Hume argues for the positive effects on character of the study of “the sciences and liberal arts,” of having “the model of a character,” and persisting in good habits. (Hume, “Sceptic,” pp. 170–71. I became aware of this essay by reading Kupperman, *Learning from Asian Philosophy*, p. 110.) Presumably, Hume believes that these practices help one cultivate appropriate passions that exist incipiently. However, Hume does not make this clear. In any case, the view of ethical cultivation that is predominant in Hume’s writings, and the one that has had the greatest influence in the development of Western ethics, is a discovery model.

moral facts “out there.” Hume tried to get around this by arguing that disagreements over moral matters are due to the same passions operating in different environments.<sup>118</sup> Most philosophers have not found Hume’s strategy compelling, though. There have also been a variety of procedures suggested for starting from what we discover morally and then rationally arguing about these so as to achieve consensus. For example, John Rawls (borrowing a concept from Nelson Goodman) suggested that we seek “reflective equilibrium,” in which we adjust our moral principles in the light of our particular moral judgments, and vice versa, until we find a good fit. No such method has succeeded in producing widespread consensus, though.<sup>119</sup>

I submit that seeing the hegemony of discovery models in Western ethics since the Enlightenment helps explain the hold that moral anti-objectivism has on so many philosophers (and non-philosophers) today. If one assumes a pure discovery model, then, if there are any objective moral facts, they could be (and would have to be) discovered by anyone who just looked for them. However, the fact is that we “discover” different things when we look at morality. Some people “discover” that capital punishment is intrinsically barbaric, others “discover” that it is unjust as currently applied, still others “discover” that it would be a denial of justice to suspend the application of capital punishment even though it is sometimes applied unfairly. These “discoveries” are incompatible. In addition, as I noted above, efforts to rationally modify or accommodate our disparate discoveries seem to have failed. Consequently, a pure discovery model seems to strongly support the conclusion that there are no objective moral facts.

But a pure discovery model is hardly the only option open to us. As we have seen, there are not only discovery, development, and reformation models, but also a variety of subtle ways in which the models can be combined. It may be that what is problematic is not objective morality but rather the simplistic model of ethical development that has predominated among Western philosophers since the Enlightenment.

II.B.3.B. ETHICAL CONNOISSEURS. All views of ethical cultivation – except for the most simplistic of discovery models – have something in common: all assume that ethical perception is something that we can

<sup>118</sup> Hume, “Dialogue.”

<sup>119</sup> Rawls, “Outline of a Decision Procedure for Ethics,” and idem, *A Theory of Justice*, §9, pp. 46–53.

get better at. In other words, development, re-formation, and the more nuanced kinds of discovery models all assume that there can be what we might call ethical connoisseurs.

In some areas of human concern there are evidently *not* connoisseurs. I might be better than my friend at doing things like setting up a new desktop computer, but this does not make me a connoisseur of it. Setting up a new computer is simply a matter of following the instructions in the hardware manual. If you can read the book, identify the parts of the computer referred to by the book, and manipulate them as the instructions direct, you can set up the computer. As this example suggests, part of what is distinctive about areas of concern in which there are *not* connoisseurs is that *there are explicit rules* about how to proceed, and *it requires no special perceptiveness to apply these rules*. Another distinction is that, in non-connoisseur areas, *there is a definitive way of judging success*. If the computer simply won't boot up after I have set it up, and someone else comes along, reads the instructions, switches two cables, and the computer now works, there is no real debate over which of us followed the instructions correctly.

Most of us, I think, believe that there *are* connoisseurs in many areas of human concern. There are clothing connoisseurs, music connoisseurs, ice-skating connoisseurs, food and scotch connoisseurs, film connoisseurs, and painting connoisseurs, to name just a few. Although my example above of non-connoisseur knowledge had to do with computers, there can be connoisseurs in scientific or technical areas as well: of two computer programs that have precisely the same input and output for all values, the connoisseur perceives that one program is elegant while the other is "kludgy." What is distinctive about connoisseurs in all of these areas is that they perceive clearly things the rest of us "see darkly" (if at all), that there are no straightforward rules to follow in order to perceive these things (as Mengzi observes, "A carpenter or a wheelwright can give another his compass or T-square, but he cannot make another skillful" [7B5]), and that there are no definitive tests for the presence of the things they perceive. To say these things is not to say that there are absolutely no standards for success or failure in these areas, or that there are no ways to learn how to be a connoisseur. A wine guide will teach you the meaning of words like "gown," "aftertaste," "nose," and "corked," and it will give you hints about what kinds of things to "look for" in a wine. This book learning is useful, of course, only in conjunction with the experience of actually tasting various wines. And, ideally, since no

wine book can be comprehensive, one should taste under the guidance of an experienced connoisseur. ("Yes, this estate *does* usually produce fine wines, but the weather was unseasonably cold this particular year, so you'll find that this vintage is too dry.")

Why should there not also be ethical connoisseurs? After all, ethical action and judgments require perception of what is ethically relevant, but we know that even ordinary "seeing" can be quite complicated. As Kuhn observed, "Looking at a bubble-chamber photograph, the student sees confused and broken lines, the physicist a record of familiar subnuclear events."<sup>120</sup> And if theoretical paradigms can enable us to see, or prevent us from seeing, facts about the world, how much more so do our desires and emotions enable or disable our vision? As Iris Murdoch remarks,

By opening our eyes we do not necessarily see what confronts us. We are anxiety-ridden animals. Our minds are continually active, fabricating an anxious, usually self-preoccupied, often falsifying *veil* which partially conceals the world.<sup>121</sup>

The love which brings the right answer is an exercise of justice and realism and really *looking*. . . It is a *task* to come to see the world as it is.<sup>122</sup>

Ruists sometimes use gustatory metaphors to suggest that there are ethical connoisseurs. Thus, a quotation attributed to Kongzi in *The Mean* (Chapter 4) observes, "There are no people who do not eat and drink, but few are those who can appreciate the flavors." Similarly, Mengzi observes,

Those who are starving find their food delicious; those who are parched find their drink delicious. They have no standard for food and drink because their hunger and thirst injure it. Is it only the mouth and belly that hunger and thirst injure?! Human hearts too are subject to injury. If one can prevent the injury of hunger and thirst from being an injury to one's heart, then there will be no concern about not being as good as other people. (7A27)

I asserted earlier that "most of us" think there are connoisseurs, at least in some areas. But some people reject the notion of connoisseurs entirely. Part of the resistance to the notion of connoisseurs (whether in morals or other areas) is caused by that odious creature, the snob. A true connoisseur is not a snob, but connoisseurs are sometimes mistaken for snobs, and snobs for connoisseurs. It is important to distinguish the two, though. As Thackeray (who brought the term "snob" into prominence)

<sup>120</sup> Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, p. 111.

<sup>121</sup> Murdoch, "Sovereignty of Good," p. 84. Emphasis in original.

<sup>122</sup> Murdoch, "Sovereignty of Good," p. 91. Emphasis in original.



noted, "You must not judge hastily or vulgarly of Snobs: to do so shows that you are yourself a Snob."<sup>123</sup>

Snobs possess only semblances of the virtues of a true connoisseur, but they wish to appear to be connoisseurs and are often taken to be so by others. A snob normally will not be fully aware that he is a snob, but there are degrees of self-awareness, and many snobs will have some degree of recognition that they are phonies. (This awareness, and the concomitant fear of being exposed as a fraud, is frequently part of what causes snobs to be such unpleasant persons.) Snobs are motivated largely by the social prestige and esteem that comes from being regarded as an expert in a certain area. They try to appear like experts, almost always by using the jargon of the field. If there are conventions about how experts in this field dress and act, they will ape those. Since snobs are motivated by the desire for prestige, they tend to be arrogant and condescending. Since snobs are not really experts, they are usually very dismissive of those who disagree with their pronouncements. It is clear why most of us dislike snobs, mock them, and want to avoid being one of them. However, the danger is that justified disdain for snobs may lead to wholesale rejection of genuine connoisseurs. (Compare Kongzi's remark, cited earlier: "I hate cleverness out of fear that it will be confused with righteousness. I hate glibness out of fear that it will be confused with trustworthiness" [*Mengzi* 7B37.12].)

Genuine connoisseurs must fight the vices of snobs. Since the facts are hard to see, a connoisseur cannot always be sure she sees them herself. Thus, she should have humility. Even when the connoisseur is certain of her judgment, she knows that her expertise is difficult to obtain and supererogatory, so she cannot fault those who lack it. Thus, she should have patience. Thackeray laments that "it is impossible, in our condition of society, not to be sometimes a Snob."<sup>124</sup> However, I think it is not just what Thackeray called the "lord-olatry" of Victorian society, nor the "celeb-ocracy" of our own that creates snobs (though both are hostile to good character). There is an intrinsic tendency for the virtues of the connoisseur to pull one toward the vices of a snob. Since being a connoisseur is an ideal toward which one aspires, and since it requires making evaluative judgments and taking them seriously, ethical connoisseurship tempts one toward arrogance and being "judgmental" (in a bad sense). There

<sup>123</sup> Thackeray, *Book of Snobs*, "Prefatory Remarks," p. 5.

<sup>124</sup> Thackeray, *Book of Snobs*, "The Influence of the Aristocracy on Snobs," p. 15.

is, therefore, an unending and inescapable tension between connoisseurship and snobbery. But the only way to avoid this tension is through banality.

Clear ethical perception is required in order to apply ethical rules. We need, after all, to be able to perceive when we are confronted with a situation to which the rules apply. However, many who have emphasized ethical cultivation (in both China and the West) have downplayed the importance of moral rules. Thus, the emphasis on cultivating ethical perception is related to the fact (mentioned earlier) that virtue ethics tends toward the particularist end of the generalist-particularist spectrum. Advocates of virtue ethics tend to hold that the complexity and subtlety of actual ethical life requires judgment that goes beyond what could be provided by moral rules. Hence, moral rules are either just rules of thumb or else require substantive interpretation in order to be applied to specific circumstances. Because of this, the need for ethical connoisseurs is great.

We see a commitment to particularism evident in many Ruist texts. In a famous passage from the *Analects* (11.22), Kongzi is asked by his disciple Zilu, “should one immediately take care of it” when one learns something. Kongzi responds in the negative: one should defer to the judgment of one’s elder family members before putting it into practice. On a later occasion, Kongzi is asked the very same question by Ran Qiu. This time, Kongzi responds in the affirmative. Zihua asks Kongzi why he gave different answers to the same question. Kongzi responds, “Ran Qiu is overly cautious, and so I wished to urge him on. Zilu, on the other hand, is reckless, and so I sought to make him more cautious.” Here we see particularism illustrated in regard to ethical teaching. Such adaptation of the style, and even the content, of ethical teaching according to the needs and abilities of the student came to have a technical name in Buddhist thought: *upâya*, “skillful means.” (This is a topic to which we shall return in Chapter 2, §I.C and §II.B.)

The emphasis on ethical particularism is also clear in the *Mengzi*. Mengzi is asked whether he would, in violation of the ritual prohibition against it, grab his sister-in-law’s hand if this were necessary to save her from drowning. Mengzi’s interlocutor apparently expects this to be an inescapable dilemma for the Ruist, but Mengzi easily responds, “To not pull your sister-in-law out when she is drowning is to be a beast. That men and women should not touch in handing something to one another is the ritual, but if your sister-in-law is drowning, to pull her out with your

hand is discretion [quán 權]” (4A17; cf. 6B1). The word Mengzi uses here, “quan,” became a technical term in Chinese philosophy, where it was contrasted with “jīng 經, the standard.” (We could say that not touching your sister-in-law’s hand is *jīng*.)

However, as the term “standard” suggests, there is also some commitment to general rules in Ruism. After he has described at length how differently sages acted in varying situations, Mengzi is asked by one of his disciples whether there is anything that sages have in common. He replies that there is: “if any could obtain all under Heaven by performing one unrighteous deed, or killing one innocent person, he would not do it.” This seems to be an example of a categorical Ruist ethical rule.<sup>125</sup>

### III. ARGUMENTATION

Turning to the second major theme of this book, I shall begin with a thin characterization of an argument. An argument is always addressed to an audience (or audiences). This condition is easy to misunderstand, though. The author of the argument and her audience(s) need not be physically present together. I give many arguments in this book, but the members of the audiences I direct them to are typically not physically present with me or with each other while they read the arguments. (In a face-to-face debate, the participants present arguments, but presenting an argument is not the same as participating in a debate.) The argument makes assumptions that the audience should accept, and ideally *does* accept. These constraints on assumptions are related to the purpose of the argument, which is to obtain agreement regarding the conclusion, or (if the audience already agrees with the conclusion) to justify our shared agreement in the conclusion. These assumptions may be explicitly stated, but many will not be. These assumptions are supposed to justify acceptance of the conclusion.

In every culture that we know of, people engage in argumentation. This is unsurprising because humans always have disagreements and uncertainties. There are other ways to resolve disagreements and uncertainties besides arguments, of course. One may appeal to the milfoil stalks in ancient China, the Urim and Thummim among the ancient

<sup>125</sup> Mengzi 2A2, *Readings* p. 129. And see Wei, “Chu Hsi on the Standard and the Expedient.”

Hebrews, or other divination methods. People may compromise or defer out of agreeableness, or (more insidiously) simply submit to authority or coercion. But as any parent of small children knows, “Why?” is a natural human question. And even in the “decision procedures” that seem the farthest removed from philosophy, argumentation may be invoked. We may argue over an interpretation of the hexagram and judgment given us by the milfoil. We may argue over whether the High Priest properly used the Urim and Thummim. Was he ritually pure when he used them? Did he manipulate them in order to protect a relative?

In addition, in every culture that we know of, people evaluate arguments, distinguishing between arguments that should persuade and those that should not persuade. Since argument is by its nature dialogical, such evaluation always makes a claim to intersubjectivity. That is, humans in every culture claim not just that some arguments please them personally, but that those arguments *should* obtain the agreement of others. Likewise, humans in every culture claim not just that some arguments *displease* them personally, but that those arguments *should not* obtain the agreement of others. If this were not the case, it would be inexplicable why we sometimes become angry when others fail to be persuaded by our arguments, or when others are persuaded by what we regard as unpersuasive arguments. Argument that is eristic or sophistic simply proves these points since the possibility of engaging in sophistic argument is parasitic on the practice of sincere argument. I could not silence my opponent with a specious argument unless my culture acknowledged that arguments present challenges that have to be either answered or accepted. I could not find sophistries subversive unless I thought that they could either fool others into accepting them or undermine the general practice of argumentation.

In the contemporary West (and in parts of the world influenced by the Western philosophical tradition), there are technical names for the aspects of an argument. The assumptions that the audience does, or should, accept are called “premises.” The claim that the assumptions are supposed to justify is called the “conclusion.” For convenience, I shall sometimes use these terms in this book. However, one need not have these terms in one’s language in order to give an argument. (It would be an example of the “lexical fallacy” [discussed in §I.B.2.b] to claim that there were no arguments in ancient China on the grounds that they had no words that may be accurately translated as “premise” or “conclusion.”)

There has also been significant work done in the West in categorizing and analyzing the ways in which premises and a conclusion can be related. One common contemporary typology of arguments is deductive, inductive, and inference to the best explanation.<sup>126</sup> However, this particular typology is a thick conception of what argument is. It is not necessary to accept this particular thick conception of argument types in order to give arguments. In fact, it is not necessary to have *any* explicitly stated typology of arguments in order to give arguments. Very few people in the contemporary West know what the phrase “modus ponens” means, or know that there is a specific deductive schema corresponding to this name. However, I submit that almost any sane person could understand the force of an argument that was of that logical form and would understand that it does not make any sense to accept the assumptions of that argument yet deny what it was trying to convince you of.

So *are* there arguments in early Chinese texts? I said a little bit at an abstract level about this topic in my discussion of methodology in §I.B.1. But let’s look at some concrete examples, from a variety of pre-Qin Chinese texts:

(1)

Mozi asked a Ruist why the Ruists make music.

He replied, “Music is for the sake of music.”

Mozi said, “You have not yet answered me. Suppose I asked, ‘Why do you build houses?’ and you answered, ‘To keep away the cold in winter, and the heat in summer, and to separate men from women.’ Then you would have told me why you build houses. Now I am asking why you make music, and you answer, ‘Music is for the sake of music.’ This is like, ‘Why do you build houses?’ ‘Houses are for the sake of houses.’” (*Mozi*)<sup>127</sup>

(2)

Chen Xiang met Mengzi and discoursed on the doctrines of [Xuzi], saying, “... The worthy plough with their subjects and then eat, eating breakfast and dinner with them and then governing. In the present case, [the state

<sup>126</sup> An excellent introduction to contemporary views on argumentation may be found in Cahn, “Elements of Argument.”

<sup>127</sup> *Mozi*, Chapter 48, “Gong meng” (my translation). Cf. Mei, *Motse*, p. 231. This is a particularly intriguing exchange because the Ruists’ response to the Mohist challenge, 樂以為樂也, could be interpreted quite differently as “Music (yuè) is for the sake of pleasure (lè).” (Cf. Graham, *Disputers*, pp. 40–41.) This is clearly what at least some Ruists would have said about the justification for music. (Cf. *Xunzi* 20, “Discourse on Music.”) Were the Mohists uncharitably misinterpreting (intentionally or otherwise) the Ruist reply?

of] Teng has granaries and treasuries; this is to harm the people in order to nurture oneself. How can this be worthy?"

Mengzi said, "Xuzi must plant his grain first and only then eat?"

Chen said, "That is so."

Mengzi said, "Xuzi must weave his cloth and only then wear clothes?"

Chen said, "No. Xuzi wears hemp."

Mengzi said, "Does Xuzi wear a cap?"

Chen said, "He does."

Mengzi said, "What sort does he wear?"

Chen said, "He wears plain silk."

Mengzi said, "Does he weave it himself?"

Chen said, "No. He exchanges millet for it."

Mengzi said, "Why does Xuzi not weave it himself?"

Chen said, "That would interfere with farming."

Mengzi said, "Does Xuzi use clay pots for cooking, and an iron plough?"

Chen said, "That is so."

Mengzi said, "Does he make them himself?"

Chen said, "No. He exchanges millet for them."

Mengzi said, "Exchanging millet for tools does not harm the blacksmith. And when the blacksmith exchanges tools for millet, does this really hurt the farmer?! Why does Xuzi not become a blacksmith, and only get everything from his own household to use? . . ."

Chen said, "The activities of the various artisans inherently cannot be done along with farming."

Mengzi said, "In that case, can governing the world alone be done along with farming?"

...

[Chen said,] "If we follow the Way of Xuzi, market prices will never vary, and there will be no artifice in the state. Even if one sends a child to go to market, no one will cheat him. Cotton cloth or silk cloth of the same length will be of equal price. . . . Shoes of the same size will be of equal price."

Mengzi said, ". . . If a great shoe and a shoddy shoe are the same price, will anyone make the former?" (*Mengzi* 3A4)

(3)

Once you and I have started arguing, if you win and I lose, then are you really right and am I really wrong? If I win and you lose, then am I really right and are you really wrong? Is one of us right and the other wrong? Or are both of us right and both of us wrong? If you and I can't understand one another, then other people will certainly be even more in the dark. Whom

shall we get to set us right? Shall we get someone who agrees with you to set us right? But if they already agree with you, how can they set us right? Shall we get someone who agrees with me to set us right? But if they already agree with me, how can they set us right? Shall we get someone who disagrees with both of us to set us right? But if they already disagree with both of us, how can they set us right? Shall we get someone who agrees with both of us to set us right? But if they already agree with both of us, how can they set us right? If you and I and they all can't understand each other, should we wait for someone else? (*Zhuangzi*)<sup>128</sup>

(4)

There once was a man who dealt in spears and shields. First he would praise his shields saying, "My shields are so strong that nothing can penetrate them." Then a moment later, he would praise his spears saying, "My spears are so sharp that there is nothing they cannot penetrate." A person in the crowd asked the man, "If one were to use one of your spears to try to pierce one of your shields, what would happen?" The man could not answer him, because "impenetrable shields" and "all-penetrating spears" are two claims which cannot stand together. (*Han Feizi*)<sup>129</sup>

There is absolutely no question in my mind that, if any of the four preceding pieces of text were found in a Western philosophical work (with the names changed to, say, Greek names), each would be regarded as presenting at least one philosophical argument – and a quite good argument at that!

Of course, it is *conceivable* that the appearance of giving an argument is specious. It *may* be that, when we consider (as we should) the larger intellectual context in which these texts were produced, we will come to see that what seem like arguments are really not. However, as I suggested in §I.B.1, the claim that the ancient Chinese masters did not produce arguments is typically connected with the belief that we cannot *find* coherent arguments in their works, or that they were *really* concerned with how to live as opposed to the truth, or that argumentation is impossible without having formal logic. But these claims all seem false. A concern with how to live is *not* inconsistent with giving arguments, and one can argue *without* knowing formal logic. Finally, a large part of this book is an effort to show that we *can* find coherent arguments (and often quite challenging arguments) in ancient Chinese texts, if we just apply the same interpretive techniques and effort that are routinely granted major Western philosophers.

<sup>128</sup> *Zhuangzi* 2, "On Equalizing Things," *Readings*, p. 223.

<sup>129</sup> *Han Feizi* 8, "A Critique of the Doctrine of the Power of Position," *Readings*, p. 330.

In this chapter, I have partially defended the value of analyzing arguments in Chinese texts and applying the concepts of virtue ethics to Ruist texts. But so far what I have said is in the form of abstract “promissory notes.” The real test of any interpretation is how well it works on specific passages in particular texts. So let us turn to the first major thinker we shall examine, Kongzi.



## Kongzi and Ruism

When it comes to reading the *Analects*, there are those who read it and it has absolutely no effect; there are those who read it and find one or two sentences that they like; there are those who read it and know enough to be fond of it; and there are those who read it and then are “unaware of their hands waving in accordance with it, their feet dancing in tune with it.”

– Master Cheng

When I began to read Confucius, I found him to be a prosaic and parochial moralizer; his collected sayings, the *Analects*, seemed to me an archaic irrelevance. Later, and with increasing force, I found him a thinker with profound insight and with an imaginative vision of man equal in its grandeur to any I know.

– Herbert Fingarette

Kǒngzǐ 孔子 (552 or 551 to 479 B.C.E.) provides the intellectual background against which all later thinkers react, and he started a movement that continues to be socially and philosophically influential more than two thousand years later. (This movement is called the Rújiā 儒家, the “School of the Ru,” in Chinese, but has traditionally been called “Confucianism” in English, after the Jesuit Latinization of Kongzi’s name, “Confucius.”)<sup>1</sup>

Kongzi was born into a society in crisis. The central authority of the Zhou Dynasty had disintegrated. Though there was still a Zhou king, he reigned but did not rule. Actual power had devolved upon the individual states, typically dukedoms, into which the kingdom was divided. Each state made its own laws, raised its own taxes, had its own army, and not infrequently waged war on (or was attacked by) other states. The resulting

<sup>1</sup> On the vexed term “ru,” see Jensen, *Manufacturing Confucianism*, Eno, *Confucian Creation of Heaven*, Appendix B, and Zufferey, *To the Origins of Confucianism*.

situation was chaotic and led to great suffering for the common people. It was believed that, in the distant past, there had been periods of utopian government under rulers who had “Virtue” (dé 德). Those with Virtue were given a mandate to rule by a higher power referred to as “Heaven” (tiān 天). Of those with Virtue, especially important and admirable were the sage kings Yao, Shun, Yu (who founded the Xia Dynasty), Tang (who founded the Shang Dynasty), Wen, and Wu (who founded the Zhou Dynasty). Ruists also revered the Duke of Zhou, who had a crucial role in assisting King Cheng, the son of King Wu, when he ascended to the throne as a minor. Antithetical to these paragons were Jie (whose misrule as king brought the Xia Dynasty to an end), tyrant Zhou (the vicious final ruler of the Shang Dynasty), and You (the later Zhou Dynasty king whose reign marks the beginning of the final decline of that dynasty).<sup>2</sup>

Although many people agreed (at least in outline) with this view that dynasties rise and are sustained by Virtue but decay and fall by its absence, more and more rulers and ministers in Kongzi’s era acted as if only brute military force and ruthless political strategizing would bring success (or just survival). Thus, the *Zuozhuan* (an early Chinese narrative history) reports that in 529 B.C.E., when the state of Jin is dominant and the state of Lu attempts to resist its authority, a leading minister of Jin ominously informs them,

Our ruler has here 4,000 chariots of war. Even if he acts contrary to the Way, it is still necessary to fear him; if he, beyond that, is acting in accordance with the Way, who can prove his opponent? An ox may be meager; but if it fall upon a pig, would you not fear the pig would die? . . . If we lead on the multitudes of Jin, using also the forces of the other states? . . . , if we come thus to punish Lu for its offenses . . . what can we seek that we shall not get?

Although the minister from Jin suggests that his ruler is ethically in the right (“acting in accordance with the Way”), one suspects this is in the spirit of the Western saying, “God favors the side with the bigger battalions.” Lu gets the message and quickly accedes to Jin’s demands. The situation was well summed up by the famous statesman Zichan, who

<sup>2</sup> In Chinese, these individuals are Yáo 堯, Shùn 舜, Yǔ 禹, Tāng 湯, Wén 文, Wǔ 武, Zhōu Gōng 周公, Chéng 成, Jié 桀, Zhōu 紂 and Yōu 幽. Note that the name of the last, evil king of the Shang Dynasty is Zhōu 紂, whereas the name of the succeeding dynasty is the Zhōu 周. Although written with different characters and pronounced with different tones, the two words look the same in Romanization, so I always refer to the evil king as “tyrant Zhou.”

observed, "If a state does not show itself strong, it will be insulted, and no longer fit to be a state."<sup>3</sup>

Kongzi's response to this situation was to try to bring about a return to the values, ideals, and practices of the ancient traditions, which embodied the ethically correct "Way" (daò 道). He hoped that if genuinely virtuous people obtained positions of government authority (as by becoming ministers to dukes), they would govern for the benefit of the people and would gradually be able to reduce reliance on warfare and penal sanctions. He sought to obtain such a position himself and also trained disciples.

Many of Kongzi's key terms had an ancient pedigree. *De*, "Virtue," was originally the almost magical Power of the King that induced others to obey him without the need for the use of military force or other forms of violent coercion. Kongzi illustrated the power of Virtue when he said, "To rule by Virtue is like the Pole Star: it remains in its place and the crowd of stars bow around it" (2.1). Those chapters of the *Documents* that authentically date from around the founding of the Zhou Dynasty (approximately 1040 B.C.E.) make clear that the possession of *de* had come by that time to be associated with qualities that are recognizably virtues, such as deference and kindness. In addition, it was accepted by this time that individuals who were not kings, such as the Duke of Zhou, could also possess Virtue. The original sense of *tian*, "Heaven," is less clear. But for the thinkers we are studying in this book, Heaven is a beneficent higher power, which is sometimes thought of in a highly anthropomorphic way (as by the early Mohists) or more impersonally (as it was by the Ruists). The standard etymology of *dao* identifies its root sense as a path (a meaning that is preserved in the modern Chinese compound dàolù 道路, "road"). By an obvious metaphor (which we also have in English), "way" in the sense of path was extended to mean a "way" of doing something, especially the *right* Way to live and to organize society. Then, by association, it came to refer to a linguistic account of a way. Eventually, through a further metaphorical extension, "dao" was

<sup>3</sup> *Zuozhuan*, Duke Zhao, Year 13. Translations modified from Legge, *Ch'un Ts'ew*, p. 652. Cf. the discussion in Yuri Pines, *Intellectual Foundations of Confucian Thought*, pp. 114–16. The date of composition of the *Zuozhuan*, and its reliability as an historical source, are much disputed. Pines suggests that the *Zuozhuan* dates from no later than 360 B.C.E., and may be as early as the fifth century B.C.E., which would put it not far from the time of Kongzi (*Foundations of Confucian Thought*, pp. 31–34). For a less optimistic view about dating the *Zuozhuan*, see Schaberg, *Patterned Past*, Appendix, pp. 315–24.

adopted to refer to a metaphysical entity that is responsible for the way things are and the way they should be.<sup>4</sup> There is dispute over when the term was first used in its metaphysical sense and how best to understand this metaphysical Way. For example, to what extent is it immanent in the world and to what extent does it transcend the world? I think we clearly see the term used in a metaphysical sense, describing something at least partially transcending the everyday world, in *Dàodéjīng* (道德經) 25:

There is a thing confused yet perfect, which arose before Heaven and earth.  
Still and indistinct, it stands alone and unchanging.  
It goes everywhere yet is never at a loss.  
One can regard it as the mother of Heaven and earth.  
I do not know its proper name;  
I have given it the nickname “the Way.”

But I would claim that there is no textual evidence that the thinkers I discuss in this book were interested in such a metaphysical Way, as opposed to the Way to live or organize society.

As the above quotation suggests, the Way as a metaphysical entity is often associated with the “Daoism” of Lǎozǐ (老子), reputed author of the *Daodejing*.<sup>5</sup> Those with some previous familiarity with Chinese thought may wonder why there is no section in this book on Laozi. There is, after all, a tradition that Laozi was a contemporary of Kongzi’s. In brief, I agree with a number of recent scholars that stories about several early “sages” gradually coalesced into an account of one supposed individual, “Laozi,” that the *Daodejing* is an anthology of sayings that accumulated over time, and that it did not reach anything like its current state until much later than the time of Kongzi. In particular, I would say that significant parts of the *Daodejing* are no earlier than the philosophical “language crisis” of the mid fourth century B.C.E. (which I discuss in §I.B.2). All of these claims are the subject of ongoing debate. However, I think that my fundamental claims could still be substantiated even if it turned out that the most traditional accounts of the life of Laozi and the composition of the

<sup>4</sup> On the etymology of “dao,” see Eno, “Cook Ding’s Dao and the Limits of Philosophy,” pp. 129–30 and 145nn9–10. See also Angle and Gordon, “‘Dao’ as a Nickname.”

<sup>5</sup> “Daoism” was written “Taoism” in the older Wade-Giles Romanization, whereas “Laozi” was written “Lao Tzu,” and “Daodejing” was “Tao Te Ching.” I put “Daoism” in scare quotes because in the period that this book covers the term does not refer to a well-organized movement. “Daoism” is at best a loose but sometimes helpful label (like “conservative” or “liberal”).

*Daodejing* were true. Consequently, in this book I will pass by the *Daodejing* in respectful silence.<sup>6</sup>

In my view, Kongzi is the first of four individuals who radically changed the direction of early Chinese philosophy, the other three being Mòzǐ 墨子, Yáng Zhū 楊朱, and Huì Shī 惠施. They are certainly not the *only* great thinkers in early China. Mèngzǐ 孟子, Zhuāngzǐ 莊子, and Xúnzǐ 荀子 are in a league with the greatest philosophers of any intellectual tradition. But Kongzi, Mozi, Yang Zhu, and Hui Shi each revolutionized Chinese thought in some fundamental way.

Mozi (fifth century B.C.E.) presented the first well-developed Way that was an alternative to Ruism, and he made argumentation (biàn 辯) central to philosophical discussions. Mozi was as concerned as Kongzi to rescue his society from its crisis, but as we shall see in Chapter 3, Mozi emphasized directly aiming at producing social benefit (lì 利) over cultivating individual Virtue. He argued that the Ruist ritual practices were pointless and wasteful, and that the “graded love” they advocated led to conflict (cf. §II.A.2). Instead, he advocated impartial care (jiān ài 兼愛) for the material well-being of everyone.

Yang Zhu (early fourth century B.C.E.) made the notion of “human nature” (rén xìng 人性) central to philosophical discussions, and he used it to present an intellectually powerful challenge to both Ruism and Mohism. Human nature is planted in us by Heaven, which both Ruists and Mohists recognize as the highest ethical authority. And, Yang Zhu argued, it is human nature to preserve one’s own life. Both the Ruist and Mohist Ways require that we act contrary to our own natures by sacrificing ourselves for the well-being of others. Therefore, both are unjustified and injurious distortions of our nature.

Hui Shi (later fourth century B.C.E.) was one of the central figures in the “language crisis” of Chinese philosophy. He gave arguments for paradoxical conclusions (such as “I went to Yue today, and arrived there yesterday”), but he saw his approach as having ethical implications (such as “Let concern spread to all the myriad things; heaven and earth count as one unit”). Although Hui Shi was probably a serious and sincere thinker (he was a minister to the ruler of Liang), he inspired the sophistries of Gōngsūn Lóng 公孫龍 (fl. early third century B.C.E.), famous for arguing

<sup>6</sup> See Roth, “Some Methodological Issues in the Study of the Guodian Laozi Parallels,” for a survey of the recent debate over the history of the *Daodejing*. For my own interpretation of the Wang Bi version of the *Daodejing*, see Van Norden, “Method in the Madness of the *Laozi*.”

that “a white horse is not a horse.” After Hui Shi, philosophers would have to take a stand on the reliability of language (especially “words,” *míng* 名) as normative and descriptive guides, with some (like the so-called “Daoists”) embracing paradox, others (the later Neo-Mohists who wrote the “dialectical chapters” of the *Mozi*) attempting to develop a philosophy of language that could preserve the reliability of literal language, and still others (Ruists like Xunzi) trying to use language in ways that are flexible, yet not paradoxical.

Of the four revolutionary thinkers above, I shall discuss Kongzi, Mozi, and Yang Zhu in this book. I shall also discuss Mengzi, who provided what became one of the most historically important Ruist responses to Mozi and Yang Zhu. Although Hui Shi is a contemporary of Mengzi’s, I think he had little influence on Mengzi’s thought. In addition, discussing Hui Shi properly would require exploring the later ramifications of his thought in Zhuangzi, the *Daodejing*, the Neo-Mohists, and Xunzi. Consequently, I shall reserve talking about Hui Shi for another time.

As I shall explain in the next chapter, we probably have a good idea what Mozi himself thought, or at least what his early followers advocated. Tragically, though, we know very little about the specific teachings of Yang Zhu and Hui Shi.<sup>7</sup> What about Kongzi?

## I. TEXTUAL ISSUES

### I.A. One Traditional View

Most traditional scholars in both China and the West have believed that we have many reliable sources of information about Kongzi and his views. Typical is the position of Zhu Xi. First and foremost, Zhu Xi believed, there is the *Analects*, a collection (recorded soon after his death by his disciples) of Kongzi’s aphorisms, descriptions of Kongzi’s actions and demeanor, some brief dialogues he engaged in, and some similar material about Kongzi’s immediate disciples (who, being loyal to and having studied under Kongzi, followed Kongzi’s own views). The *Greater Learning* (*Dàxué* 大學) begins with a brief but pregnant quotation from Kongzi, followed by extensive commentary on that quotation by Kongzi’s disciple,

<sup>7</sup> I give my own conjectures about Yang Zhu in Chapter 4, §I. Excellent discussions of Hui Shi and Gongsun Long may be found in Harbsmeier, *Language and Logic in Traditional China*, pp. 290–311, Graham, *Disputers*, pp. 75–95, and Graham, “First Reading of the ‘White Horse.’” I translate Gongsun Long’s “On the White Horse” in *Readings*, pp. 363–68.

Zēngzǐ 曾子. *The Mean* (Zhōngyōng 中庸) was composed by Kongzi's grandson, Zīsī 子思 (who was also a disciple of Zengzi), but he wrote it in order to preserve aspects of Kongzi's worldview not recorded elsewhere. Mengzi was a Ruist who studied under Zisi, and his sayings represent an elaboration and defense of Kongzi's worldview.<sup>8</sup>

Kongzi (Zhu Xi would continue) also wrote the "Ten Wings," a set of commentaries on the *Yijing* 易經 that reveals much about his metaphysical views. He composed the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, a cryptically terse historical work. Through careful study of Kongzi's choice of words in this text, we can gain insight into his judgments of the actions of various figures in the two centuries up to and including the time of Kongzi himself. There are various other largely reliable sources of information about Kongzi, such as the biography of him by Sīmǎ Qiān 司馬遷 in his *Records of the Historian* (which provides the historical context for many of the *Analects* sayings) and brief quotations attributed to him in other works.

Unfortunately, modern scholarship has undermined the confidence that Zhu Xi and his many later followers had in their sources. Sima Qian seems to have taken a mass of stories and legends about Kongzi and just tried to organize them in as coherent a manner as he could. The *Spring and Autumn Annals* may very well date from the time of Kongzi. However, it may not be by Kongzi, and even if it is, and even if there are ethical judgments somehow encoded in it, that encoding is so cryptic that it seems impossible to do any more than guess about what Kongzi's judgments might be. The "Ten Wings" of the *Yijing* are now thought to date from no earlier than 300 B.C.E. The *Record of Rites* (Lǐjì 禮記), a work of which *The Mean* and the *Greater Learning* are sections, is believed to date from about the same time, long after the death of Kongzi and his disciples. In any case, as I noted in my discussion of "New Confucianism" in the previous chapter (§I.B.3), our study of intellectual traditions should make us very suspicious of any claim that followers of a tradition (even immediate disciples) merely reproduce the views of the founder. We also know that the disciples of Kongzi disagreed among themselves over what the true teachings of the Master were. (This is reflected in the partisan squabbling among the disciples, such as is recorded in *Analects* 19.12, a passage I discuss in §II.A.2.) Consequently, we should be wary of assuming

<sup>8</sup> As I noted in Chapter 1, §I.B.3, the *Greater Learning*, *Analects*, *Mengzi*, and *The Mean* were grouped together by Zhu Xi as the *Four Books* (meant to be studied in that order), which became the basis of Ruist higher education for six hundred years.

that the views of Zengzi, Zisi, or Mengzi are identical with those of Kongzi. Turning to the *Analects* itself, already in the Qing Dynasty, the brilliant scholar Cui Shù 崔述 (C.E. 1740–1816) demonstrated conclusively that Books 16–20 of the *Analects* have linguistic features that distinguish them from the rest of the text and suggest they date from a considerably later period.<sup>9</sup>

## I.B. Problematic Passages

### I.B.1. *Analects* 4.15 and the “One”

Consequently, it seems that we are left with Books 1–15 of the *Analects* (leaving out “disciple sayings”) as our only reliable source of information about Kongzi. Alas, even parts of this material are suspect. Consider *Analects* 4.15, which Zhu Xi made central to later interpretations of the text:

The Master said, “Zeng! All that I teach can be strung together on a single thread.”

“Yes, sir,” Master Zeng responded.

After the Master left, the disciples said, “What did he mean by that?”

Master Zeng said, “All that the Master teaches amounts to nothing more than dutifulness (*zhōng* 忠) tempered by reciprocity (*shù* 恕).”

*Shu* is characterized for us very clearly in *Analects* 15.24: “Do not impose upon others what you yourself do not desire.” I shall translate it as “reciprocity,” just to have a convenient English tag for it. But what can “zhong” mean here? “Zhong” often has the sense of loyalty to a superior, but ethically informed loyalty, rather than blind loyalty. As Kongzi said, “If you

<sup>9</sup>Mengzi attributes a work called the “Spring and Autumn Annals” to Kongzi (*Mengzi* 3B9), but this is a generic term for an historical chronicle, so the work we know by that name may not be the same one. For a helpful introduction to the *Yijing* and its use by later Ruists, see Smith et al., *Sung Dynasty Uses of the I Ching*. Individual chapters within the *Liji* may be earlier than the third century B.C.E. For example, the “Ziyi 緇衣” chapter of the *Liji* is in the Guōdiàn 郭店 manuscripts, which means that it dates from no later than the fourth century B.C.E. However, on this basis, some scholars have jumped to the very precipitate conclusion that other parts of the received text of the *Liji* that were *not* found at Guodian are also fourth-century texts. This is like concluding that, because a freshman English anthology includes selections from *Hamlet* and *Dubliners*, these works therefore date from the same era – and were written by the same person. (See Cheng, “Liji: Zhongyong, Fangji, Ziyi.”) On the *Analects*, see Cui, *Kaoxin lu*. Lau, *Analects*, pp. 222–27, gives a clear, nontechnical summary of Cui Shu’s results in English. See also Makeham, “Formation of *Lunyu* as a Book,” Brooks and Brooks, *Original Analects*, and Slingerland, “Why Philosophy Is Not ‘Extra’ in Understanding the *Analects*.”



really care for people, can you then fail to put them to work? If you are really loyal (*zhong*) to them, can you then fail to instruct them?" (14.7). But any plausible reading of "zhong" in 4.15 must explain how *zhong* can, in connection with *shu*, unify all of the Master's Way. Loyalty is inadequate to supply *everything* else in Kongzi's Way that is not covered by the concept of "not imposing on others what you yourself do not desire."

Zhu Xi provided an answer, suggesting that *zhong* is not simply loyalty but "fully realizing the self," which involves a strong personal commitment to the Way. And it was Zhu Xi who made common the belief that 4.15 is central to interpreting the *Analects*. Neither Mengzi nor Xunzi (the next major Ruist philosophers) quote the passage or pair *zhong* and reciprocity as Zengzi does. *The Mean* does make specific reference to *zhong* and reciprocity, but even there they are just two of a number of concepts in the text, not the organizing themes of the work as a whole. The earliest surviving commentary on the *Analects* (that by He Yan et al. in the third century C.E.) does not even bother to comment on Zengzi's pairing of *zhong* and *shu*.<sup>10</sup> But it is not surprising why a systematic philosopher such as Zhu Xi, who saw the "pattern" (lǐ 理) as unifying everything in the world, would seize on a passage that claimed to give the "one" thing that weaved together the thought of the Master.

Many recent interpreters have followed Zhu Xi in emphasizing 4.15. D. C. Lau follows Zhu Xi's account most closely, whereas Fung Yu-lan, Herbert Fingarette, David S. Nivison, and others read 4.15 in different ways from Zhu Xi but agree with him in stressing its central importance in the *Analects*. I shall refer to all accounts that take Zengzi (as presented in 4.15) as having accurately expressed the "one" thing that binds together the Way of Kongzi as "Zengzian." Philip J. Ivanhoe offers what I believe is the most plausible Zengzian interpretation, so I shall focus on his version. In his earlier work, Ivanhoe emphasized the hierarchical nature of *zhong*: that it is directed toward superiors. Since the traditional practices of the sages are themselves superior to us, it would be a natural extension of the root meaning of *zhong* to think of it as loyalty to their lǐ 禮, "ritual practices." (I discuss the *lǐ* in §II.A.1, below.) Loyalty to the ritual practices would not be all of the Way of Kongzi, though, because Kongzi advocated following the rituals in a manner that is humane and flexible. Reciprocity (*shu*), then, would amount to a practice of imaginatively putting ourselves

<sup>10</sup> *The Mean*, Chapter 13. (See Legge, *Confucian Analects*, pp. 393–95.) For a translation of the relevant portion of He Yan's commentary (side by side with that of Zhu Xi), see Gardner, *Zhu Xi's Reading of the Analects*, pp. 157–61.

in another's place so that we can apply the rituals humanely and learn when it is appropriate to bend or modify them.<sup>11</sup>

Ivanhoe has since refined his position slightly in response to criticisms, such as that of Heiner Roetz. Roetz draws attention to the following passage from the *Zuozhuan*:

所謂道，忠於民而信於神也。上思利民，忠也。祝史正辭，信也。 What is meant by the Way is to be dutiful (*zhong*) in regard to the people and to be faithful in regard to the spirits. For superiors to concentrate on benefiting the people is dutifulness (*zhong*). For the ministers of (religious) sacrifices to be correct in their address (to the spirits) is faithfulness.<sup>12</sup>

Roetz wants to make two claims about this passage: (1) it falsifies the generalization that *zhong* is always an attitude toward social peers or superiors, and (2) it shows that one can, in the ancient Chinese worldview, be loyal to one's subordinates. Ivanhoe agrees with the first claim, but he wishes to deny the second. Ivanhoe thinks that what the passage shows is that *zhong* is best understood as "conscientiousness" toward one's duties rather than as "loyalty" (toward one's social superiors, or anything else). So Ivanhoe's final interpretation of *zhong* and *shu* in the *Analects* has not changed: *zhong* is a commitment to one's duties, especially as these are embodied in the traditional rituals; *shu* is a principle of reciprocity ("do not impose upon others what you yourself do not desire"), which informs our adherence to our duties, making it humane and flexible. However, Ivanhoe arrives at this conclusion via a more direct route than he had in his earlier work: he argues that *zhong* is not to be primarily understood as "loyalty to social peers and superiors," and hence by analogy as "loyalty to one's social duties," but is instead generally to be understood as "conscientiousness to one's duties." For now, I shall follow Ivanhoe (and Edward Slingerland) in rendering "*zhong*" as "dutifulness" so that my discussion will be easier to follow in English.<sup>13</sup> (Later I shall propose an alternative translation that I feel is more accurate.)

<sup>11</sup> Ivanhoe, "Reweaving the 'One Thread' of the *Analects*." Ivanhoe developed in important ways ideas advanced in Fung, *History of Chinese Philosophy*, vol. 1, p. 71 n1, Nivison, "Golden Rule Arguments in Chinese Moral Philosophy," and Fingarette, "Following the 'One Thread' of the *Analects*."

<sup>12</sup> *Zuozhuan*, Duke Huan, Year 6. (Cf. Legge, *Ch'un Ts'ew*, p. 48.) Cited in Roetz, *Confucian Ethics of the Axial Age*, p. 312 n159.

<sup>13</sup> Ivanhoe, "Golden Rule in the *Analects*," Slingerland, *Analects*. In his essay, Ivanhoe responds not only to Roetz, but also to the interpretations of Sin Yee Chan, Bo Mou, and myself. Paul Goldin also has an understanding of the term *zhong* that distinguishes it from loyalty, but in a slightly different way from Ivanhoe ("When *zhong* Does Not Mean 'Loyalty'").

Ivanhoe has proposed a powerful reading of dutifulness (*zhong*) and reciprocity (*shu*) in the *Analects* – if we regard *Analects* 4.15 as expressing Kongzi’s own view. However, I have argued at length elsewhere that this passage is a later interpolation and that Zengzi’s interpretation does not express Kongzi’s own view.<sup>14</sup> Briefly, my reasons are as follows:

1. The story recounted is historically implausible. Zengzi was one of Kongzi’s younger disciples. Indeed, there is no record in the *Analects*, outside of 4.15, of Zengzi even having a direct conversation with Kongzi. Furthermore, there is evidence that Zengzi was not one of Kongzi’s smarter disciples: he is described in 11.18 as “stupid” (lǔ 魯), and none of his comments suggest an acute mind. Consequently, it is very odd that Kongzi should toss at him a patently cryptic comment and then assume he understood it. Also odd is the fact that the other disciples rush up to Zengzi to ask for an explanation. This suggests a high regard for Zengzi that is inconsistent both with his youth and with his lack of demonstrated intellectual prowess.

2. Zengzi’s explanation of what Kongzi meant is itself implausible. Kongzi spoke of “one” thing by means of which his Way was bound together, but Zengzi mentions *two* things. Zhu Xi ingeniously suggests that Zengzi mentioned two things because he was trying to explain in simpler terms the deep insight he had into Kongzi’s teachings (but that the other disciples could not share because they are not fully enlightened as he and Kongzi are). Many modern interpreters follow D. C. Lau’s suggestion that dutifulness and reciprocity are two aspects of humaneness (*rén* 仁), Kongzi’s central virtue.<sup>15</sup> (They take this as license to cite passages that discuss humaneness as evidence for their reading of 4.15.) But this still leaves us with an unanswered question: if Kongzi meant that his Way was bound together by humaneness, why didn’t Zengzi just say *that*? Why did he eschew any direct reference to humaneness in explaining what Kongzi meant?

3. The Chinese text is lexically anomalous in that it includes the only occurrence in the *Analects* of the character *hū* 乎 being used as a vocative particle. (The character *yě* 也 normally functions in this role.)

4. The Chinese text is syntactically anomalous. Generations of scholars steeped in the Classical Chinese language have reached no consensus about how to parse Kongzi’s statement. Many English translators follow Arthur Waley’s interpretation: “My Way has one (thread) that runs right through it.” But this translation is not close to the syntax of the original Chinese. What makes the original text difficult to interpret is that it seems to be an awkward reworking of a phrase from *Analects* 15.3. But this suggests that 4.15 is an interpolation modeled on another passage rather than a quotation of an authentic exchange.

<sup>14</sup> See Van Norden, “Unweaving the ‘One Thread,’” for more detailed expositions of the arguments I give here.

<sup>15</sup> Zhu Xi, *Sishu jizhu*, commentary on *Analects* 4.15, Lau, *Analects*, pp. 15–16. On “humaneness,” see §II.B in this chapter.

For all these reasons, it seems likely that 4.15 is an awkward later interpolation into the text of the *Analects*. How did it get into the text? We know that Zengzi was a leader in a later Ruist sect. As I observed, there is no evidence outside of 4.15 that he had much interaction with Kongzi. It would have helped greatly in legitimating Zengzi's status if there were a passage in which he figured prominently as an interpreter of Kongzi's thought. (Of course, one does not have to accept this speculation in order to agree that points 1–4 above give us good reason for being suspicious of 4.15.)

The difficulty of establishing the authenticity of 4.15 would not make much difference as long as the rest of the *Analects* seemed informed by the same vision of dutifulness and reciprocity as the central concepts in Kongzi's thought. A passage can be insightful and representative of a text as a whole despite being an interpolation. However, if we accept 4.15 as expressing Kongzi's view (and not merely Zengzi's), we get a very different image of Ruism than we do if we reject that passage as alien to Kongzi's thought. For one thing, 4.15 makes early Ruism seem much more systematic than it otherwise would. (I suspect that this is part of what has attracted philosophers since Zhu Xi to this passage.) In addition, if we put our hand over 4.15 (so to speak) and then read the rest of the *Analects* without it, there is no reason to pair dutifulness and reciprocity or to privilege them over other key terms in the text. Third, while I would now agree that "zhong" has a broader sense than just "loyalty," it is stretching the sense of the term too far to think of it as meaning dutifulness to one's social roles in general. I think David Schaberg is closer to the mark in his suggestion that *zhong* is a commitment to the interests of some public figure or figures, especially when this commitment involves renouncing one's private good: "This may be a commitment to upholding the interests of the people one rules; it may also be a commitment to the interests of the ruler one serves or, more generally, of the other individuals and states with which one is related in the ritual and political structure."<sup>16</sup> Consequently, I would normally render "zhong" as "devotion."

<sup>16</sup>Schaberg, *Patterned Past*, p. 157. Yuri Pines arrives at a similar conclusion (*Foundations of Confucian Thought*, pp. 146–58). Schaberg and Pines base their characterizations on extensive readings of early historical texts including the *Zuozhuan* and the *Guoyu*. (I am in the debt of scholars such as Roetz, Ivanhoe, Goldin, Schaberg, and Pines for convincing me that the original sense of *zhong* is broader than mere "loyalty.") Schaberg sees *yì* 義, "righteousness," as playing the conceptual role that Ivanhoe attributes to *zhong* (ibid., pp. 155–56). (See §II.B. for more on *yì*.)

Ironically, the weakness of a Zengzian reading of the *Analects* is illustrated by a passage that several scholars have adduced as support for this interpretation.<sup>17</sup> In *Analects* 5.19, Zizhang said to Kongzi,

Prime Minister Ziwen was given three times the post of prime minister, and yet he never showed a sign of pleasure; he was removed from his office three times, and yet never showed a sign of resentment. When the incoming prime minister took over, he invariably provided him with a complete account of the official state of affairs. What do you make of Prime Minister Ziwen?

Kongzi replied, “he was certainly dutiful (*zhong*).” When Zizhang asks, “Was he not humane?” Kongzi responds, “I do not know about that – what makes you think he deserves to be called humane?”

Ivanhoe suggests that the reason Kongzi was chary of attributing “humaneness” to Ziwen was that, although he had demonstrated dutifulness (*zhong*), he had not demonstrated reciprocity (*shu*), the other aspect of complete humaneness. This is certainly a possible reading. Unfortunately, it is equally possible that Kongzi thought Ziwen had failed to demonstrate any number of other virtues that are mentioned in the *Analects*. Had Ziwen shown that he was courageous? faithful? wise? righteous? filial? Unless we assume in advance that 4.15 gives us the key to interpreting the *Analects*, why should we think that Ziwen is lacking only one trait in order to be humane, much less think that a commitment to reciprocity is that trait?

Not only does 5.19 not provide evidence in favor of a Zengzian reading of the *Analects*, it actually provides some evidence against it. On the Zengzian reading, “*zhong*” in 5.19 refers to dutifulness to one’s social roles *in general*. Why is Kongzi so comfortable in attributing *this* to Ziwen based on merely what he has just heard about him? All we have heard about is Ziwen’s behavior in the context of taking and leaving office. What about his behavior toward his parents? at ritual sacrifices? when supporting a friend in need? when leading troops in combat? On a Zengzian understanding of *zhong*, Kongzi is saying that he knows Ziwen to be dutiful in all these cases. (He simply is unsure whether he also practices reciprocity.) In contrast, if we interpret *zhong* as devotion to the interests of one’s ruler, we can see much more easily why Kongzi is confident in his attribution. Ziwen has indeed shown that he is *devoted* to

<sup>17</sup>Nivison (“Golden Rule Arguments,” p. 66), Ivanhoe (“Reweaving the ‘One Thread,’” p. 26), Slingerland (*Analects*, commentary on 4.15), and Ivanhoe (“‘Golden Rule’ in the *Analects*”) all cite *Analects* 5.19 in connection with defending their interpretations of *zhong*. Again, Ivanhoe is the most explicit in laying out his argument.

the ruler's interests, regardless of whether his ruler rewards his devotion or not.

A further problem becomes evident if we read *all* of 5.19, for the passage continues with Zizhang asking Kongzi about another individual:

When Cuizi assassinated the Lord of Qi, Chen Wenzi – whose estate amounted to ten teams of horses – abandoned all that he possessed and left the state. Upon reaching another state, he said, “The officials here are as bad as our Great Officer Cuizi,” and thereupon left that state. Again, after going to another state, he said, “The officials here are as bad as our Great Officer Cuizi,” and thereupon left that state as well. What do you make of Chen Wenzi?

Kongzi replied, “He was certainly pure (qīng 清).” And when Zizhang asks, “Was he not humane?” Kongzi responds, “I do not know about that – what makes you think he deserves to be called humane?” This section of 5.19 is almost exactly parallel with the earlier section, except for one important difference. Why does Kongzi say that Chen Wenzi was “pure” (*qing*) as opposed to “dutiful” (*zhong*)? When Chen Wenzi fled his state, thereby refusing to profit from living under a government headed by an assassin, was he not being dutiful to his social roles? Is “pure” just a synonym for “dutiful”? Or are there now *three* aspects to humaneness, instead of two: dutifulness, purity, and reciprocity? I can construct explanations of why, on a Zengzian understanding of *zhong* as *dutifulness*, Kongzi said that Chen Wenzi was “pure” as opposed to “dutiful,” but they seem to me quite convoluted. In contrast, there is no difficulty in understanding what Kongzi is saying if *zhong* is *devotion*. Ziwen showed the narrow (but important) virtue of devotion in his service to his lord. Chen Wenzi showed the narrow (but important) virtue of purity in refusing to benefit, even indirectly, from assassination. But Ziwen's actions do not illustrate purity, and Chen Wenzi's actions do not illustrate devotion. In each case Kongzi felt that the presence of one specific virtue did not warrant the attribution of the other virtues needed for humaneness.

Consideration of this passage illustrates several important aspects of the hermeneutic methodology we discussed abstractly in Chapter 1. (1) First, we see the importance of citing specific textual evidence in favor of one's interpretation. *Analects* 4.15 and 15.24 are among the primary pieces of textual evidence for Zengzian readings of *zhong* and *shu*. (2) However, the text does not come preinterpreted. We have to argue for an interpretation on the grounds that it makes the best sense of the text overall (where “making sense” is largely guided by the principles of

charity and humanity). So Zhu Xi, Lau, Fung, Nivison, Fingarette, and others offer alternative explanations of why it makes sense to say that the Way of Kongzi is composed of *zhong* and *shu*. (3) Third, we support our interpretations of individual words by arguing for what makes the best sense out of the sentences in which they occur. So Roetz cites a passage in which “zhong” occurs, and he argues that his reading can make sense of it, whereas Ivanhoe’s cannot. Ivanhoe alters his interpretation to make sense of the use of “zhong” in this passage as well as the relevant *Analects* passages. (4) The interpretive process is holistic: we have to make sense out of words and sentences as they relate to other words and sentences. So any reading of 5.19 will have to explain how “zhong” (“dutiful”) differs from “qing” (“pure”), and how the statements about Chen Wenzi relate to the statements about Ziwen. (5) Although there is no definitive proof of an interpretation, there are interpretations that do more or less violence to the text, and there is evidence that one can and must cite and respond to in offering an interpretation.

However, Zengzians may feel that I have not fully done justice to the requirement that an interpretation be holistically adequate. Even if 5.19 is more problematic than it seemed at first, there are a number of other passages that are relevant. Consider Kongzi’s comments about his disciple Zigong. On the one hand, he clearly has some good qualities. He is eloquent (11.3), has a good head for business (11.19), and Kongzi compares him to a rare ritual vessel (5.4) – a metaphor that suggests his value, even while it implicitly condemns him for his narrowness (cf. 2.12). However, Kongzi seems to be at pains to point out the ways in which Zigong fails to manifest reciprocity. It is to Zigong that Kongzi gives the characterization of reciprocity as “do not impose upon others what you yourself do not desire” when Zigong asks for “one phrase that can serve as a guide for one’s entire life” (15.24). It is to Zigong that Kongzi explains (in what is typically taken to be an alternative characterization of reciprocity), “Desiring to take his stand, one who is humane helps others to take their stand; wanting to realize himself, he helps others to realize themselves. Being able to take what is near at hand as an analogy could perhaps be called the method of humaneness” (6.30). When Zigong confidently announces, “What I do not wish others to do unto me, I also wish not to do unto others,” Kongzi swats him down by saying, “Ah, Zigong! That is something quite beyond you” (5.12). And Zigong was given to inappropriately criticizing others (14.29), something he presumably would not have done had he put himself in the shoes of those whom he criticized. Given Zigong’s combination of good and bad traits, it seems natural

to understand him as someone whose “dutifulness” fails to be properly informed by “reciprocity.”

But notice an intriguing pattern. There are very few passages about reciprocity that do *not* involve Zigong. If we combine this observation with the fact that Kongzi typically phrases his replies with the needs of his interlocutor in mind (cf. 11.22), we arrive at the conclusion that these passages show more about what Kongzi saw as the specific weakness of Zigong than about a general feature of human ethical experience. This is not to deny that Kongzi thought reciprocity was important for everyone. However, Kongzi thought that all kinds of virtues are important for everyone. The question is whether dutifulness and reciprocity are privileged in his general conception of virtue. The fact that Kongzi kept bringing up reciprocity with Zigong, who clearly had a special problem in manifesting it, is poor evidence that he wanted to privilege it, along with dutifulness, in his general account. Furthermore, note that there are no passages at all in which Zigong is characterized as “dutiful” (*zhong*). This is not to deny that he was *zhong*. But if Kongzi’s main point about Zigong is that he is *zhong* but does not manifest reciprocity, why does he never come out and mention that Zigong is *zhong*?

Still, a Zengzian will point out that there are other passages that might be read as illustrating the split between dutifulness and reciprocity, most notably 12.2:

Zhonggong asked about humaneness.

The Master said, “When in public, comport yourself as if you were receiving an important guest, and in your management of the common people, behave as if you were overseeing a great sacrifice. Do not impose upon others what you yourself do not desire. In this way, you will encounter no resentment in your public or private life.”

It is plausible to read the first two sentences (“When in public . . .” and “in your management of . . .”) as being about dutifulness to one’s social roles, and the third is clearly a statement of reciprocity. *Analects* 15.15 also can very neatly be read as being about dutifulness and reciprocity. Can’t we say that what makes the best sense, all things considered, of these passages, *and* the passages about Zigong, *and* 4.15 itself is a Zengzian reading of dutifulness and reciprocity? Doesn’t the requirement to give a holistic interpretation push us toward this conclusion?

No. The problem is that the Zengzian interpretation is guilty of what is called, in the business world, “cherry picking.” Cherry picking is when a salesman racks up a seemingly impressive series of sales by going only



for the easiest clients, leaving the “hard sells” alone. But just as the best salesman can sell to not just the easy clients, but also the demanding ones, so is the best interpretation the one that can handle not just the passages that are easy for it, but the rest too. More concretely, the problem with the Zengzian interpretation is that it focuses on the handful of passages that might seem to privilege dutifulness and reciprocity, but then it ignores the larger number of passages that do not. For example, 12.2 does lend itself to a Zengzian reading. But it is part of a series in which Kongzi gives three very different answers to the question of what humaneness is, and two of those answers are not Zengzian at all. In 12.3, in response to Sima Niu’s question about humaneness, Kongzi replies, “The humane person is hesitant to speak.” We perhaps share Sima Niu’s incredulity when he says, “‘Hesitant to speak’ – is that all there is to humaneness?” But Kongzi assures him, “When being humane is so difficult, how can one not be hesitant to speak about it?” The Zengzian owes us an interpretation of *this* passage, as well as 12.2. Perhaps she will say that in 12.3 Kongzi is not giving a privileged, general characterization of humaneness but is rather giving one suited to the particular needs of his interlocutor. No doubt true. But why not say the same about 12.2?

Perhaps we can dismiss Sima Niu as deserving only a fairly cursory and simplistic answer to his question. But then what about 12.1? In this passage it is Yan Hui who has asked the question about humaneness, and he was Kongzi’s brightest and most promising disciple (prior to his untimely death). Kongzi tells him, “Do not look unless it is in accordance with ritual; do not listen unless it is in accordance with ritual; do not speak unless it is in accordance with ritual; do not move unless it is in accordance with ritual.” This sounds like dutifulness (especially as Fingarette and Ivanhoe characterize it). Why, in talking to his most advanced disciple, does Kongzi stress dutifulness but make no mention of reciprocity? And what about 5.16? In that passage, Kongzi characterizes the “Way of the gentleman” by saying that it is comprised of reverence, respectfulness, kindness, and righteousness. On the Zengzian reading, which of these corresponds to dutifulness? which to reciprocity?

In summary, a Zengzian account simply does not make good sense of the *Analects* as a whole. There are some passages it handles rather well (such as 12.2 and also 15.15). Some passages (such as the series regarding Zigong) could be handled in Zengzian terms, but they could just as easily be handled by another account. Most importantly, there are a number of passages that no Zengzian has given a strong account of. If dutifulness and reciprocity are really the two aspects of humaneness,

why does Kongzi characterize humaneness in so many ways that seem inconsistent with this? And how are all the other virtue terms in the *Analects* systematically related to dutifulness and reciprocity?

As we shall see in §II.B below, there are in fact other virtue terms that are consistently stressed and grouped together by Kongzi himself (not just by his “stupid” [11.18] junior disciple).

### *I.B.2. Analects 13.3 and “Correcting Names”*

But perhaps 4.15 is an exception in the otherwise homogenous Books 1–15? Sadly, no. *Analects* 13:3 is another passage that, if we take it as representative of Kongzi’s thought, would significantly alter our conception of Ruism:

Zilu asked, “If the Duke of Wei were to employ you to serve in the government of his state, what would be your first priority?”

The Master answered, “It would, of course, be the rectification of names (*zhèngmíng* 正名).”

Zilu said, “Could you, Master, really be so far off the mark? Why worry about rectifying names?”

The Master replied, “How boorish you are, Zilu! When it comes to matters that he does not understand, the gentleman should remain silent. If names are not rectified, speech will not accord [with actuality]; when speech does not accord [with actuality], things will not be successfully accomplished. When things are not successfully accomplished, ritual practice and music will fail to flourish; when ritual and music fail to flourish, punishments and penalties will miss the mark. And when punishments and penalties miss the mark, the common people will be at a loss as to what to do with themselves. That is why the gentleman only applies names that can be properly spoken [*yán* 言], and assures that what he says can be properly put into action. The gentleman simply guards against arbitrariness in his speech. That is all there is to it.”

In isolation, the notion of “correcting names” (also translated “rectifying names”) is somewhat obscure. However, one can construct, on the basis of passages from the *Analects* and other works, some conception of what is being attributed to Kongzi here.<sup>18</sup> Correcting names seems to involve bringing language and the world into accordance with one another. This

<sup>18</sup>Although many scholars have discussed the doctrine of “correcting names,” the most systematic and carefully argued study of this topic from a philosophical perspective is an unpublished master’s thesis by Loy Hui Chieh, “On Correcting Names: Language and Politics in the *Analects*.” I am indebted to Loy’s thesis on many points. John Makeham’s *Name and Actuality in Early Chinese Thought* is also an excellent study, but one that focuses more on the reception of the notion of correcting names in later Chinese thought.

can be done in two complementary ways: reforming naming practices so that the language used is appropriate for the reality described, and reforming reality so that it corresponds to the language that applies to it. An example of the former might be offered by *Mengzi* 1B8, in which Mengzi is asked about the historical reports that virtuous Tang (later King Tang) led an army to banish the tyrant King Jie, and Wu (later King Wu) led an army that executed the tyrant King Zhou. Mengzi's interlocutor asks, "Is it acceptable for subjects to kill their rulers?" Mengzi replies,

One who violates benevolence should be called a "thief." One who violates righteousness is called a "mutilator." A mutilator and thief is called a mere "fellow." I have heard of the execution of a mere fellow "Zhou," but I have not heard of the killing of one's ruler.

In other words, a term like "king" carries with it a connotation of certain actions and virtues that are appropriate to that role. Although tyrant Jie and tyrant Zhou were commonly called "kings," they did not live up to their obligations as kings. Consequently, we should not use the word "king" to refer to them.

A more cryptic (at least for us today) application of correct naming may be illustrated when Kongzi moans, "A *gu* that is not a *gu* – is it really a *gu*? Is it really a *gu*?" (6.25). A *gū* 觚 is a certain sort of ritual vessel. Commentators generally agree that Kongzi is here lamenting the fact that his contemporaries use as a *gu* what is not really a *gu* (because it is the wrong shape or the wrong size for a traditional *gu*). Thus, one way of understanding Kongzi's concern is that people are wrongly using the term "gu" to refer to vessels that do not really conform to that name.

It is clear that correcting names involves, at the least, the former process of reforming linguistic usage. Some have argued, though, that correcting names also involves reforming reality so that it corresponds to the language that applies to it. *Analects* 12.11 might be interpreted as advocating this second aspect of correcting names. When asked about governing, Kongzi is alleged to have responded,

Let the ruler be a ruler, the ministers ministers, the fathers fathers, and the sons sons.

That is, one should strive to live up to the role-specific obligations that befall one when one bears the title of "ruler," "minister," "father," or "son." We shall see that Kongzi might have had special reason to invoke this application of correcting names in the context of 13.3 because of

the political situation in Wei when he made his pronouncement there about “correcting names.”

Why is correcting names so important? The two complementary aspects of correcting names correlate with two mutually reinforcing goals. On the one hand, if a language (either our contemporary language or some language that we have access to via tradition) reflects an ideal social order, then reforming things so that they are in accordance with their (ideal) names is a way of bringing society closer to a utopia. However, it is possible for a language to become so debased that it can no longer play this role. This will tend to happen if people get in the habit of using words in ways that neglect the ethical connotations associated with them. For example, if names are used correctly, “father” will carry the connotations of “nurturer, protector, ethical guide.” The presence of these connotations will encourage fathers to fulfill these roles. But if people start to use the term “father” to refer merely to a human sire, then it will seem less anomalous and objectionable that a father should be absent, indifferent, or even competitive with his children. (The Jerry Springer show cannot be far behind.) Consequently, both reforming things to accord with their ideal names and reforming names to accord with their ideal uses are tools for restoring social order.<sup>19</sup>

The importance of correcting names in achieving both of these goals is suggested by the later Ruist Xunzi:

So when the kings established names, the names were fixed, and the corresponding objects were thus distinguished. This way was followed, and the kings’ intentions were thus made understood. . . . Thus, they called it great

<sup>19</sup>MacIntyre (*Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*) suggests that we can “compare and contrast languages in respect of the degree to which some particular language-in-use is tied by its vocabulary and its linguistic uses to a particular set of beliefs, the beliefs of some specific tradition” (p. 374). On the one hand, there can be “a language as it is used in and by a particular community living at a particular time and place with particular shared beliefs, institutions, and practices. These beliefs, institutions, and practices will be furnished expression and embodiment in a variety of linguistic expressions and idioms” (p. 373). In contrast, there are “the internationalized languages of modernity” (p. 384), such as English, whose associated ethical ideal (if any) is “a certain type of rootless cosmopolitanism” (p. 388), and which have “been developed so as apparently to become potentially available to anyone and everyone, whatever their membership in any or no community” (p. 373). The Ruist method of correcting names can be seen as attempting to maintain (or reproduce) languages and communities of the former kind. Ruism also illustrates MacIntyre’s claim that a tradition of the former kind “has to be embodied in a set of texts which function as the authoritative point of departure for tradition-constituted enquiry and which remain as essential points of reference for enquiry and activity, for argument, debate, and conflict within that tradition” (p. 383). (The *Four Books* obviously “function as the authoritative point of departure for tradition-constituted enquiry” in the later Ruist tradition.)

vileness to mince words and recklessly create names so as to disorder the correct names and thereby confuse the people and cause them to engage in much disputation and litigation. This wrongdoing was considered to be just like the crime of forging tallies and measures.

Later in the same passage, Xunzi makes clear the benefits that come from rectifying names:

Because none of the people dared rely on making up strange names so as to disorder the correct names, they were unified in following the proper model of the Way and were conscientious in following commands.

Xunzi concludes with a lament about the consequences of the failure to keep names correct:

Nowadays, the sage-kings have passed away, and the preservation of these names has become lax. Strange words have arisen, the names and their corresponding objects are disordered, and the forms of right and wrong are unclear.<sup>20</sup>

The preceding description of correcting names would secure the agreement of many scholars. My own view is that the preceding account does, *in broad outline*, capture what “correcting names” is and why it has some importance: the right names, applied to the right objects, provide clear ethical guidance, which facilitates social unity and harmony. With the correct use of names, people will know what is expected of their social roles and be motivated to conform to those expectations.

But I have left out one important issue. How central is correcting names to the thought of Kongzi? In 13.3, he is answering a question from Zilu about what should be the “first priority” in governing. Consequently, many interpreters have seen correcting names as one of the central concepts in Kongzi’s thought. Thus, Chad Hansen has gone as far as to say that correcting names “underlies *all* the features of Confucian political theory that make it unique.”<sup>21</sup> A. C. Graham and Benjamin Schwartz attributed a less hegemonic role to correcting names in Kongzi’s thought. For them correcting names is *a* central notion in Kongzi’s thought, not

<sup>20</sup> Xunzi 22, “On Correct Naming,” *Readings*, p. 293.

<sup>21</sup> Hansen, *Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, p. 66. Emphasis mine. However, it *seems* that Hansen wishes to say that correcting names works only in one direction: reforming naming practices so that they are appropriate to the objects named. (“We simply set examples by publically [*sic*] identifying objects and by naming our modeling behaviors as we do them” [p. 67].) This, Hansen seems to think, was taken to be sufficient to guide and alter people’s behaviors. He describes it as “a typical misunderstanding of rectifying names” to think of it as “requiring that we *live up to* our names” (p. 382n35, emphasis in original).

the central notion. Nonetheless, late in his career, Graham wrote that the successful functioning of Ruist society “depends on each person doing what rightly used names instruct him to do. . . .”<sup>22</sup> And Schwartz suggested that correcting names was “a preoccupation that marked the entire subsequent development of [ancient] Chinese thought.”<sup>23</sup>

But is correcting names really something that is of general relevance and central importance in the thought of Kongzi? I am going to examine this claim in the light of four different ways of thinking about the interpretive context of *Analects* 13.3: its context of composition, its dramatic date, our own context of interpretation, and the context of the rest of the *Analects*.

First, in what context was 13.3 first composed? I find plausible Arthur Waley’s claim that the passage is “an interpolation on the part of [Xunzi] or his school, for whom the absence of any reference in the sayings of Confucius to what they themselves taught as a fundamental doctrine must certainly have been inconvenient.”<sup>24</sup> Waley is really making two distinct claims here: *historically*, 13.3 is a late addition to the text, and in terms of its *content*, 13.3 is anomalous within the *Analects*. I will paraphrase Waley’s arguments, throwing in one more of my own along the way.

1. Kongzi’s explication of correcting names in 13.3 is written in a distinctive “chain argument” style: If A, then B. If B, then C. If C. . . . But this style is not characteristic of early Chinese texts. We find the chain argument style nowhere else in the *Analects* itself, but it is very reminiscent of the opening of the *Greater Learning*, which is probably no earlier than the third century B.C.E.<sup>25</sup>
2. If correcting names is a key notion in Kongzi’s thought, why does Zilu (a disciple whom we know to have frequently talked with the Master) seem so

<sup>22</sup> Graham, *Disputers*, p. 25.

<sup>23</sup> Schwartz, *World of Thought in Ancient China*, p. 91.

<sup>24</sup> Waley, *Analects*, p. 22. *Analects* 13.3 may even show the influence of Xunzi’s student, Han Feizi, who broke with the Ruism of his teacher and defended the realpolitik of “Legalism.” Han observes, “If a ruler of men wants to put an end to vice, he must examine the correspondence between form (xíng 形) and name (míng 名), and look to see how what is said differs from what is done” (*Han Feizi* 7, “The Two Handles,” *Readings*, p. 324). He proposes that rulers reward people when name and form match but punish people when they do not. Cf. the reference to “punishments and penalties” in *Analects* 13.3.

<sup>25</sup> Knoblock (*Xunzi*, vol. 3, p. 115) claims that the same style is found in *Analects* 13.4, but this is erroneous. The style of 13.4 is “If those above are P, the people will be Q; if those above are R, the people will be S. . . .” In any case, 13.3 and 13.4 are very close in the text of the *Analects*. Any similarity between them may show only that they are part of the same historical stratum.

shocked by Kongzi's invocation of it? One simple explanation is that 13.3 is a fabrication. The author of the passage anticipated that his readers would be surprised to hear Kongzi advocate this doctrine, and hoped to blunt their incredulity by having Zilu swatted down by Kongzi for expressing a similar surprise.<sup>26</sup>

There is another argument in favor of Waley's position that he does not notice:

3. The term *míng* 名, "name," is seldom used in the text of the *Analects* (a mere eight times), which is surprising if "correcting names" is a central notion for Kongzi. Furthermore, of these eight occurrences, three are in 13.3 itself and one is in 17.9 (which is in the set of chapters shown by Cui Shu to be late in origin). In every other occurrence, *míng* seems primarily associated with achieving "fame" or "good reputation" (as we would say in English, a person "making a good name for himself").<sup>27</sup> So, in this respect, 13.3 is more like late texts such as *Analects* Book 17 or Xunzi's "On Correct Naming" than it is like the rest of the *Analects*.

I find these quite powerful arguments for the historical inauthenticity of 13.3. Waley gives one more argument, which is intriguing, but more problematic.

4. About the late fourth century B.C.E., there was a "language crisis" in Chinese philosophy. The language crisis may have been triggered by Hui Shi's subtle arguments. (At the least, Hui Shi was a major early figure in the crisis.) We see this issue reflected in the *Daodejing*, *Zhuangzi*, the "dialectical chapters" of the Neo-Mohist school, and the *Xunzi*. At issue was the question

<sup>26</sup> Knoblock (*Xunzi*, vol. 3, p. 115) claims that "Zilu's objection is paralleled in other paragraphs in which he cannot grasp the master's point." Again, this is erroneous. Zilu often shows a lack of a deep understanding of Ruism, but he nowhere else expresses the outright shock he shows in 13.3, and the rudeness of his reply ("the Master's suggestion is rather wide of the mark") is quite uncharacteristic of his reverence for Kongzi. (For more on Zilu, see Van Norden, "Mencius on Courage," p. 239.)

<sup>27</sup> One possible exception is 4.5. This is translated by Slingerland, Waley, and Legge (following Zhu Xi's interpretation), "If the gentleman abandons humaneness, how can he *be worthy of that name* (*chéng míng* 成名)?" However, Lau translates, "If the gentleman forsakes benevolence, in what way can he *make a name for himself* (*chéng míng*)?" The former translation makes the passage an illustration of "correcting names," whereas the latter keeps the meaning of *míng* as "fame." Both interpretations are syntactically possible, but Lau's reading follows the historically early He Yan commentary, and it is consistent with the use of the expression *chéng míng* in 9.2: "A villager from Daxiang remarked sarcastically, 'How great is Kongzi! He is so broadly learned, and yet has failed to make a name for himself (*chéng míng*) in any particular endeavor.'" In this passage the expression is most plausibly read as "become famous." Slingerland, Waley, and Legge know this, and they translate the phrase differently in 9.2 from the way they translate it in 4.5. But shouldn't our *prima facie* assumption be that the phrase means the same thing in the two passages?

of whether names (*ming*) could adequately track actuality (*shí* 實) and guide behavior. Now, Waley writes, “In *Mencius* (early third century B.C.) there is not a trace of the ‘language crisis.’”<sup>28</sup> If this is true (and assuming that we can date the *Mengzi* as earlier than those texts that do show the influence of the language crisis), it would seem more likely that *Analects* 13.3 is a later interpolation rather than a surprising anticipation of a later debate.

However, there are several *prima facie* problems with this last argument. First, of the aforementioned texts, the *Xunzi* is the only one that can uncontroversially be dated as *later* than the *Mengzi*. Second, Hui Shi was a contemporary of Mengzi’s and was even prime minister in the state of Liang until right before Mengzi’s arrival there.

But these issues are really red herrings. The real question is whether the *Mengzi* itself shows the influence of the language crisis in the way that *Analects* 13.3 seems to. If it does, then 13.3 does not seem as anomalous within Ruism. Unfortunately, Waley goes too far in saying that there is “not a trace” of the language crisis in the *Mengzi*. In addition to 1B8, which I cited earlier, David S. Nivison has pointed out that there is also a concern with the adequacy of language as a source of moral guidance in 2A2.9. Furthermore, the similarities between what Mengzi says in 6A3–4 and what the Neo-Mohists say in the “dialectical chapters” have been noted previously by both D. C. Lau and Nivison. It is not clear to me whether Lau thinks Mengzi was influenced by the Neo-Mohist discussions or the Neo-Mohists were influenced by the issues that Mengzi debated. Nivison clearly holds, though, that Mengzi was influenced by Neo-Mohist dialectical vocabulary.<sup>29</sup>

Nonetheless, it is still possible to sustain Waley’s argument. Although Mengzi does show some interest in the philosophy of language (broadly construed), he does *not* phrase these issues in terms of “names” (*míng* 名) or “actualities” (*shí* 實). For example, the discussion in 2A2 is framed in terms of “doctrines” (*yán* 言), not in terms of “names” (*ming*). (And the use of “yan” in 2A2 as “doctrines” or “maxims” is consistent with its use in *Analects* passages such as 15.24, a passage whose early date we have no reason to doubt.) Furthermore, we saw that *Xunzi* gives an exceptionally

<sup>28</sup>Waley, *Analects*, p. 22.

<sup>29</sup>On 2A2, see Nivison, “Philosophical Voluntarism in Fourth-Century China.” On 6A3–4, see Lau, *Mencius*, pp. 258–63 and Nivison, “*Mengzi*: 6A3–5,” pp. 157, 159. See also my Chapter 4, §VI.A on *Mengzi* 6A3–4. (The Mohist “dialectical chapters” are later historically than the “synoptic chapters” of the early Mohists; see Chapter 3, §I. I am confident that the “synoptic chapters” represent views that developed earlier than Mengzi; the issue is only how Mengzi is historically related to the “dialectical chapters.”)



detailed explanation of the nature and importance of correcting names. After the passage from “On Correcting Names” that I cited above, Xunzi goes on to explain how the failure to properly coordinate names and actualities leads to sophistries like “to kill a thief is not to kill a person” and “a white horse is not a horse.” (The former claim has been associated with Neo-Mohism, while the latter is the paradox of Gongsun Long.) This suggests that combating such sophistries was part of the motive for the doctrine of correcting names. But we see no interest in responding to such sophistries in the *Analects* or the *Mengzi*.<sup>30</sup>

Interestingly, the terms “ming” and “shi” are paired in the *Mengzi*, but not with the senses that they later came to have:

Chunyu Kun said to Mengzi, “Those who put fame and achievement (*ming shi*) first act for the sake of others. Those who put fame and achievement last act for the sake of themselves. Now, there you were amidst the three chief ministers, yet before you had any fame or achievements extending to those above and below, you abandoned the position. Is a benevolent person genuinely like this?!” (6B6)

Here, Chunyu Kun is berating Mengzi for refusing to serve corrupt rulers, accusing him of selfishness for doing so. It is clear that this is how Mengzi understands the discussion, because he replies by discussing virtuous people who have similarly refused to serve bad rulers. So in this context, “ming shi” clearly means “fame and achievement.” This makes perfectly good sense if “ming” is being used as it normally is in the *Analects*. In summary, Mengzi’s use of terms like “ming,” “shi,” and “yan” is more like that of most of the *Analects* than it is like that of the *Daodejing*, *Zhuangzi*, *Xunzi*, the Neo-Mohist “dialectical chapters,” and the writings of Gongsun Longzi. So *Analects* 13.3 is anomalous when compared with a Ruist text as late as the *Mengzi* (which was probably composed during the late fourth or early third century B.C.E.).

Even if Waley’s final argument is not definitive by itself, I feel that the other arguments for the historical inauthenticity of 13.3 are convincing. But the notion of the interpretive context of a passage is slippery. We have been discussing the “context of composition” of 13.3, but what about its “dramatic date”? In other words, what is the dramatic setting for the discussion that supposedly occurred between Zilu and Kongzi? Recall that the passage begins with Zilu asking Kongzi what he would do if

<sup>30</sup> *Xunzi* 22, Watson, *Hsun Tzu*, pp. 145–46. Gongsun Longzi, author of the “white horse” sophistry, probably lived too late to have influenced Mengzi. See Qian Mu, *Xianqin zhuzi xinian*, pp. 434–35. (For more, see *ibid.*, pp. 434–37, 455–56, 461–62.)

employed by the ruler of the state of Wèi 衛. In whatever context *Analects* 13.3 was composed, it was intended to be understood as meaningful in the context of the life of Kongzi. Consequently, for the meaning of 13.3, part of the background knowledge would be the political history of Wei during the lifetime of Kongzi. Let us now consider *that* context.

In 496 B.C.E., while Duke Líng 靈 was the ruler of Wei, his son, Kuài Kuì 蒯瞶, attempted to murder his mother, Nán Zǐ 南子. (The apparent motive was that Nan Zi was having an affair.) The murder attempt failed, and Kuai Kui fled to the state of Song. In 493, Duke Ling died and was succeeded by his grandson, Zhé 輒, who was also the son of Kuai Kui. Following this, Kuai Kui attempted to return to Wei, presumably to assume the dukeship, but his son Zhe dispatched troops to prevent his return. Kongzi visited the state of Wei a few years later, in 489 or 488.

Whether or not 13.3 records an authentic exchange between Kongzi and Zilu, and regardless of when it was composed, part of its interpretive context is the knowledge that *this* is the background against which Zilu was asking his question, and *this* is the background against which Kongzi is answering that question. We must also keep in mind the particularism or context-sensitivity of Kongzi's pronouncements. These considerations suggest that Kongzi's reply to Zilu should be read, not as a general program for political reform, but rather in the light of the political situation in Wei. How would they be relevant to that context? Wei was a state in which a wife had an affair, as a result of which a son tried to murder his mother, which led to a father and son becoming estranged, which produced a situation in which a father wrestled with his son for control of a state. At each step, people were acting in ways that were not appropriate to their roles: wives were not acting like wives, sons were not acting like sons, and fathers were not acting like fathers. If part of the "rectification of names" is encouraging people to live up to the standards for behavior implicit in the "name" of their roles, then rectifying names is indeed something that should be "put first" in dealing with the problems in Wei. But in this case, the passage is a specific reference to the situation in the state of Wei rather than a description of a general political program.

There is yet a third way of thinking about the context of 13.3. John Makeham makes the ingenious suggestion that, whenever 13.3 was composed, and whatever its "dramatic date,"

it is nonetheless true that there are many passages in the *Analects* that deal with the correction of names even though they do not employ the specific

term *zheng ming* [correcting names]. If the substance of this thinking is thus compatible with that which is basic to the teachings of Confucius in the *Analects*, then the question of the legitimacy of the form (that is, the term *zheng ming*) is surely misplaced.<sup>31</sup>

Makeham goes on to approvingly quote F. W. Mote, who said that correcting names is “a functional concept throughout the *Analects*.”<sup>32</sup> I believe that Makeham and Mote are mistaken in these assertions about the prevalence of “correcting names” in the *Analects*. But let us examine the textual evidence on this issue.

Loy Hui Chieh has marshaled an impressive array of passages to show that, contrary to Waley, there is evidence of extensive interest in correcting names in other parts of the *Analects*. He lists twenty-four passages that evince such an interest: 1.11, 1.14, 2.7, 2.8, 4.20, 5.15, 6.12, 6.22, 6.25, 6.30, 11.24, 11.26, 12.20, 13.14, 13.20, 13.28, 14.1, 14.12, 14.18, 16.1, 16.14, 17.11, 17.21, 20.2.<sup>33</sup> In evaluating this evidence, I submit that we must keep the following distinction in mind. There are some passages in which there is undeniably (to use W. V. O. Quine’s expression) “semantic ascent”: “shift from talking in certain terms to talking about them.”<sup>34</sup> A clear example is 4.20: “One who makes no changes to the ways of his father for three years after his father has passed away may be called [kě wèi 可謂] a filial son.” In distinction from this, there are many passages that do not explicitly engage in semantic ascent, but that one might interpret as implying such ascent. Consider 12.11, cited earlier:

Let the ruler be a ruler, the ministers ministers, the fathers fathers, and the sons sons.

Those of us who came to intellectual maturity reading the contemporary philosophy of language will find immediately plausible some aspect of Fung Yu-lan’s interpretation of this passage:

Every name possesses its own definition, which designates that which makes the thing to which the name is applied be that thing and no other. In other words, the name is that thing’s essence or concept. What is pointed out by the definition of the name “ruler,” for example, is that essence which makes a ruler a ruler. In the phrase: “Let the ruler be ruler,” etc., the first word,

<sup>31</sup> Makeham, *Name and Actuality in Early Chinese Thought*, p. 164.

<sup>32</sup> Hsiao, *History of Chinese Political Thought*, vol. 1, p. 98n42, cited in Makeham, *Name and Actuality in Early Chinese Thought*, p. 165.

<sup>33</sup> Many would add 12.11 to this list, but Loy (correctly, to my mind) dismisses it. (See Loy, “On Correcting Names,” pp. 49–50.) See my discussion of 12.11 later in this section.

<sup>34</sup> Quine, *Word and Object*, §56, p. 271.

“ruler,” refers to ruler as a material actuality, while the second “ruler” is the name and concept of the ideal ruler. Likewise for the other terms: minister, father and son.<sup>35</sup>

Few (if any) interpreters today would read Kongzi in the Platonistic terms that Fung uses. Fung’s major influence, though, is in seeing passages like 12.11 as implicitly appealing to “semantic ascent.” Many scholars follow Fung in assuming that passages like 12.11 must “really” mean, “Let the one who is called a ‘ruler’ act like a ruler.” Similarly, Fung cites 6.25 as an illustration of correcting names: “A *gu* that is not a *gu* – is it really a *gu*? Is it really a *gu*?” A contemporary Anglo-American philosopher will instinctively interpret this as a claim about a thing referred to as a “gu” not being a real *gu*. (Or, more nominalistically, about the appropriateness of calling this particular thing a “gu.”) I submit that these paraphrases of 12.11 and 6.25 are intuitive *only* for people coming out of a particular tradition in the philosophy of language.

In discussing Fung’s interpretation and its influence, we begin to understand better our own context of interpretation for *Analects* 13.3. Fung’s *A History of Chinese Philosophy* was for decades the best-selling history of Chinese philosophy in the English-speaking world.<sup>36</sup> It is, thus, the proximate cause for the emphasis on correcting names in English-language scholarship. I think it is significant that Fung studied philosophy at Columbia University, where he says he was influenced by both the pragmatism of John Dewey and the Platonistic New Realism of Russell. In addition, Fung acknowledged the deep influence on his own work of Hu Shi’s *Zhōngguó zhéxué shǐ dàgāng* 中國哲學史大綱 (“An Outline History of Chinese Philosophy”). In that work, Hu Shi said, “Name-correction-ism is the central issue of Kongzi’s teachings,” and he himself studied at Columbia just a few years before Fung. Furthermore, Hu Shi was avowedly looking for antecedents to *Western* philosophical interests and methodologies

<sup>35</sup> Fung, *History of Chinese Philosophy*, vol. 1, p. 60.

<sup>36</sup> Fung tells the fascinating story that Derk Bodde was just finishing up his English-language translation of *A History of Chinese Philosophy* when the Korean War broke out and Bodde prudently left China. Regular communication between the People’s Republic of China and the United States was soon cut off. So it was not until twenty years later, when China began to open up again in 1972, that Fung finally learned that Bodde’s translation of his book had become the standard history of Chinese philosophy in the English-speaking world! (Feng, *Hall of Three Pines*, pp. 237–38.) Bodde’s translation was, in itself, a landmark achievement, since (in collaboration with Fung) he skillfully translated diverse texts spanning over two millennia of Chinese history. It is now very out of date in its scholarship, though.

within the Chinese tradition. So Hu Shi influenced Fung, both Hu Shi and Fung were influenced by trends in early twentieth-century Anglo-American philosophy, and Fung's *A History of Chinese Philosophy* went on to influence many Western scholars. Ironically, part of the reason for Fung's great influence may have been that English readers have assumed that, because *A History of Chinese Philosophy* is a translation of a book by a Chinese scholar, they are getting an "authentic" understanding of Chinese philosophy. In reality, Fung is one of the most Western-centric readers of Chinese thought.

Fung's influence is evident on the interpretations of Hansen, Schwartz, and Graham, among others. Of course, Hansen, Graham, and Schwartz would strongly reject the Platonism of Fung's approach. However, they are each actually following Fung in emphasizing 13.3 and in interpreting passages such as 12.11 as implicitly being about "names." This is true even when, as in Schwartz's case, they do not mention Fung in connection with "correcting names," or, as in Hansen's case, when they portray themselves as challenging Fung's interpretation.<sup>37</sup> This underlines the importance of understanding our own context of interpretation. Because of the history of the study of Chinese philosophy in English (in which Fung is, paradoxically, a central figure), and because of the centrality of the philosophy of language in twentieth-century Western philosophical thought, it is tempting for us to see *Analects* 13.3 as having a centrality in Kongzi's thought that it may not merit. It is only when we become aware of what our context of interpretation is that we can genuinely call it into question. This is an illustration of Gadamer's point that "It is the tyranny of hidden prejudices that makes us deaf to what speaks to us in tradition."<sup>38</sup>

However, we must also keep in mind that it does not invalidate Fung's or anyone else's interpretation that it is influenced by the interpreter's preconceptions. As I stressed in Chapter 1, §I, there is no way to interpret a text without some preconceptions. Nonetheless, having explored the

<sup>37</sup> Fung studied under Dewey himself and had two other teachers who were advocates of the New Realism (Feng, *Hall of Three Pines*, p. 218). On Hu Shi's influence on Fung, see *ibid.*, pp. 221–25. For the quotation from Hu, see his *Zhongguo zhexue shi dagang*, p. 82 (translation mine). Cf. Hu, *Development of the Logical Method in Ancient China*, pp. 22–27. For Fung's interpretation of 13.3, see *History of Chinese Philosophy*, vol. 1, pp. 59–62. On his influence, compare Hansen, *Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, pp. 65–71, Schwartz, *World of Thought in Ancient China*, pp. 91–95, and Graham, *Disputers*, pp. 23–25. Graham is the only one of the three to state specifically that he is following Fung, although he does it in passing in a footnote (*Disputers*, p. 24n).

<sup>38</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 270.

context of origin, the dramatic date, and our own context of interpretation of *Analects* 13.3, we are now in a position to see whether we can find a *better* reading of the text.

Let us return to *Analects* 6.25, the passage about the *gu* vessel. We have seen why it is intuitive for many of *us* to interpret this passage in terms of semantic ascent: as being about the name “*gu*” and its use. But there is no reason to assume this is how Kongzi or his contemporaries would have understood it. Kongzi may very well have felt no need to paraphrase his statement at all. And what might Kongzi say if we could ask him *hé wèi yě* 何謂也, “What do you mean?” He might have replied, “A *gu* that has lost its regulation shape is not a *gu*. I’m referring to this, but everything in the world is the same way. Hence, a ruler who has lost the Way of a ruler is not considered a ruler. A minister who has lost the responsibilities of a minister is considered an empty role.” This is, in fact, a translation of the interpretation of the passage by the eleventh-century philosopher Cheng Yi. Cheng Yi may be wrong, of course, but he is a sophisticated thinker, and nothing about the passage strikes him as requiring us to invoke names. In addition, the earliest extant commentary on the *Analects* (from almost a millennium before Cheng Yi) interprets as Cheng Yi does: “‘Is it really a *gu*? Is it really a *gu*?’ means that it is not a *gu*. This is a metaphor for the fact that if governing does not attain the Way, then it will not be successful.” Here, as with Cheng Yi, there is no reference to names. We see that native interpreters have certainly not found it obvious that 6.25 would make sense only if paraphrased into a statement about names.<sup>39</sup>

One may still have the suspicion, though, that 6.25 requires us to make at least implicit reference to names. The expression “a *gu* that is not a *gu*” seems to involve an outright contradiction. The principle of charity urges us to avoid attributing contradictions to those we interpret. How else are we to avoid attributing a contradiction in this case besides interpreting 6.25 as referring to “something called a ‘*gu*’ that is not a *gu*”? I do not think that charity requires that we do this, for two reasons. First, even if the correct semantics for 6.25 attributes semantic ascent to the sentence, this does not mean Kongzi or other native speakers realized this. Consider one of the sentences much loved by contemporary Anglo-American

<sup>39</sup> Cheng Yi is cited by Zhu Xi in his *Sishu jizhu*, commentary on 6.25. The earlier commentary I refer to is He Yan et al., *Lunyu jijie*, commentary on 6.25. Of course, there are also native interpreters who *have* seen 6.25 as related to issues about correct naming. But the point is that we cannot *assume* that 6.25 shows Kongzi emphasized correcting names.

philosophers of language, such as “Gigantor is so-called because of his size.” Philosophers of language know that this is a rather puzzling sentence since the one occurrence of the word “Gigantor” seems to be both *used* (to refer to Gigantor) and *mentioned* (because “Gigantor” is what he is so-called). However, if an ordinary native speaker, unschooled in the philosophy of language, uttered that sentence about Gigantor, it would seem very odd to say of him, “He *must* think that a single occurrence of a word can be both used and mentioned.” The fact is that most native speakers have no opinion about this matter at all. Second, if one insists that I give an alternative semantics of 6.25 that does not attribute semantic ascent to Kongzi, I have one: let the first “gu” be used referentially, and let the second be used attributively (in Keith Donnellan’s senses of those terms).<sup>40</sup> In other words, Kongzi first uses the word “gu” to refer to a group of ritual vessels, even though they do not have the characteristics that make them a *gu*. Kongzi then uses the word “gu” to identify the attributes that a *gu* has and to assert that the vessels he has referred to do not have those attributes. In the idiom of the contemporary philosophy of language, Kongzi *uses* the word “gu” twice, but he does not *mention* that word. Less technically, Kongzi is making a claim about what people *do* (i.e., treat ritual vessels that are not really *gu* as if they were *gu*), not about what they *say*.

Consequently, it would be tendentious to cite passages such as 6.25 (or 12.11) as evidence for an interest in correcting names, because we have no reason to think that Kongzi saw such statements as being about names at all. So we can avoid begging the question only if we try to make a case for Kongzi’s interest in correcting names by appealing to passages that explicitly engage in semantic ascent. The list of passages relevant to correcting names is then considerably shorter. Furthermore, we should exclude passages likely to be late because they occur in Books 16–20. This leaves us with 1.11, 1.14, 2.7, 4.20, 5.15, 6.22, 6.30, 11.24, 11.26, 12.20, 13.20, and 13.28. Even on my most suspicious days, I have to admit that some of these passages are early and probably authentic. Doesn’t this demonstrate that correcting names was a central teaching of Kongzi? I

<sup>40</sup> Donnellan, “Reference and Definite Descriptions.” (I owe this suggestion to James Joyce.)

Allow me to head off a possible misunderstanding by making a pedantic distinction. I am responding to the demand to give the semantics of 6.25 without attributing semantic ascent to the passage. In giving the semantics of a passage (any passage), one must refer to the words in the passage. So *I am engaging in semantic ascent* when I give the semantics of 6.25. But the issue is *whether 6.25 itself engages in semantic ascent*. According to my semantics, it does not.

think not, for two reasons. First, here are some samples of the passages in question:

Zigong asked, “Why was Kong Wenzi 孔文子 accorded the title ‘Cultured’ (wén 文)?”

The Master replied, “He was diligent and loved learning, and was not ashamed to ask advice from his inferiors. This is why he was accorded the title ‘Cultured.’” (5.15)

Zigong said, “If there were one able to broadly extend his benevolence to the common people and bring succor to the multitudes, what would you make of him? Could such a person be called ‘humane’?”

The Master said, “Why stop at ‘humane’? Such a person should surely be called a ‘sage.’” (6.30)

In these passages, Kongzi teaches his disciple about virtue by explaining or correcting certain locutions. If this alone constitutes correcting names, then it is hard to think of any ethical teacher who is not committed to correcting names. Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Kant, and many others engage in this kind of activity. Even in the New Testament we find Jesus saying, “Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you” (John 15.15 KJV). Do we conclude, then, that Jesus was an advocate of correcting names? We could, but correcting names is generally taken to be something fairly distinctive about Kongzi’s ethical approach. Furthermore, even taken all together, the relevant passages do not suggest that correcting names is, as a general rule, the “first priority” in governing.

Even if the passages Loy and others cite *are* all about correcting names, there are simply not enough of them to show that correcting names is “a functional concept throughout the *Analects*.” There are approximately 500 “chapters” (zhāng 章) in the *Analects*. Loy identified 24 chapters as specifically relevant to correcting names. Let’s assume, contrary to what I suggested, that all of them would have been seen by Kongzi or his contemporaries as being about “names.” That would mean that, at most, 5% of the *Analects* is about correcting names. Compare this with the single character rén 仁, “humaneness,” which is explicitly mentioned in more than 50 chapters (or more than 10%) of the *Analects*, or the character dé 德, “Virtue,” which is mentioned explicitly in 30 chapters. If you have to bet the farm on what is the central concept for Kongzi, correcting names looks like a “house bet.”



## I.C. A Particularist Hermeneutic

I have focused on *Analects* 4.15 and 13.3 because they are the two passages most frequently taken to provide the organizing theme of the text as a whole. However, they are not the only two passages whose historical provenance is suspect. Indeed, there is so much disagreement among informed, conscientious scholars over so many passages in the *Analects* that attempting to establish the teachings of the historical Kongzi is like trying to play three-dimensional chess blindfolded. How should we respond to the problematic nature of the *Analects*?<sup>41</sup>

One response would be to sidestep the issue of origins completely. For example, one can take the received text of the *Analects*, whenever it came into existence, and examine how that text has been interpreted within later intellectual traditions. For this purpose, the issue of how the text actually came into existence is moot; the closest relevant issue is how the interpreters in the tradition *believed* that it came into existence.<sup>42</sup> Another alternative is to treat the *Analects* simply as a source of stimulating philosophical conceptions or challenging intellectual worldviews. The various conceptions and worldviews one finds in the text need not be from Kongzi, and need not even be coherent with one another for us to pick some of them to explore on their own merits.<sup>43</sup>

But some interpretive approaches must directly engage the issue of historical authenticity. This is true of any tradition that regards a particular individual's words or deeds as somehow authoritative, such as orthodox Moslems when interpreting the Koran, or orthodox Christians in relation to the New Testament.<sup>44</sup> It may also be true for at least some Ruists – those who (like the New Confucians) have regarded Kongzi as embodying, preserving, and transmitting a timeless way of life.

<sup>41</sup> Other issues include whether the emphasis on ritual found in Books 3 and 10 reflects Kongzi's own concern (see Slingerland, "Why Philosophy Is Not 'Extra' in Understanding the *Analects*," and Brooks and Brooks, "Response to the Review by Edward Slingerland"), and whether 9.1 is authentic (see Brooks and Brooks, "Word Philology and Text Philology").

<sup>42</sup> Examples of this sort of project are Ivanhoe, "Whose Confucius? Which *Analects*?" Csik-szentmihalyi, "Confucius in the Han," and Louden, "What Does Heaven Say?"

<sup>43</sup> Kupperman, "Naturalness Revisited," Shun, "*Ren* and *Li* in the *Analects*," and Wilson, "Conformity, Individuality and the Nature of Virtue" are essays that are intellectually challenging for us whether Kongzi had any inkling of the ideas expressed in them.

<sup>44</sup> Harvey, *The Historian and the Believer*, is a classic study of the problems faced by Christians who wish to reconcile their faith with an historical approach to the Bible.

If we are concerned with historicity, we must avoid “cherry picking.” We should be very cautious in placing great emphasis on any one passage, especially if it seems anomalous. An example of such an anomalous passage (in addition to 4.15 and 13.3) is 7.17, which may be the only reference in the *Analects* to the *Yijing*: “If I were granted many more years,” Kongzi sighs, “so that by the age of fifty I could complete my studies of the *Yi*, this might enable me to be free of major faults.” However, there is a textual variant of the passage, which would eliminate the reference to the *Yijing*: “If I were granted many more years, and could devote fifty of them to learning, surely I would be able to be free from major faults.”<sup>45</sup> There is also a quotation from an *Yijing* “line statement” in the received text of the *Analects* (13.22). However, this passage too shows signs of corruption, and, as Zhu Xi observes, “Its meaning is not clear.” Because these are the only two passages (apparently) referring to the *Yijing*, and because both are so problematic, I have little confidence in attributing to Kongzi any interest in the *Yijing* (in whatever form it may have existed during his lifetime).<sup>46</sup> We should focus, instead, on themes that are in evidence in multiple passages.

So what is my own take on Kongzi? My “key passage” is 11.22, in which Kongzi gives opposite answers to two disciples who ask the same question. Before I am accused of doing exactly what I criticize the advocates of 4.15 and 13.3 for doing, let me explain that I emphasize 11.22 not because it stands out as giving a cipher not evident in other passages, but rather because it illustrates something we see Kongzi doing again and again: adjusting his actions and words to the particulars of his situation. Kongzi is asked about “humaneness.” He gives one answer to Fan Chi (6.22), another answer to Yan Hui (12.1), still another to Zhonggong (12.2), and to Sima Niu (12.3), and to Zizhang (17.6). Kongzi is asked about “government.” He gives one answer to Zigong (12.7), a different answer to Duke Jing of Qi (12.11), to Zizhang (12.14), to Ji Kangzi (12.17), to Zilu (13.1), and to the Duke of She (13.16). Kongzi emphasizes “reciprocity” when speaking with Zigong (15.24), warns Zilu about the dangers of excessive “courage” (5.7), and advises Zixia not to be a “petty Ru” (6.13). Is it any wonder that Mengzi said, “Kongzi was a sage

<sup>45</sup> Slingerland, who prefers the second reading, has a good brief discussion of the issue (*Analects*, pp. 69–70).

<sup>46</sup> Zhu Xi, *Sishujizhu*, commentary on *Analects* 13.22. (Slingerland’s commentary is intriguing, but I prefer Lau’s translation of the passage itself.) Because of the considerations in this paragraph, I would be less confident than JeeLoo Liu in asserting that “Confucius himself alluded to the *Yijing*” (*Introduction to Chinese Philosophy*, p. 26).

of timeliness" (*Mengzi* 5B1.5)? Or, as he put it more explicitly in another passage, "when one should stop, he would stop; when one should take a long time, he would take a long time; when one should hurry, he would hurry. This was Kongzi" (2A2.22).

So Kongzi was close to the particularist end of the generalist-particularist spectrum (Chapter 1, §II.A). However, he was not a radical particularist. As we shall see later in this chapter, he did emphasize preserving and following the rites. And although it is true that he wants us to follow these rites with flexibility and sincere emotions, he obviously attaches an importance to them beyond mere "rules of thumb." Nor are Kongzi's views haphazard. They are "bound together by one thing" (something Kongzi says himself to Zigong [15.3]). But "the Way of the Master" evades strict definition: it cannot be captured in any simple formula such as "dutifulness and reciprocity." Neither did Kongzi limit himself to any one methodology: like every other ethical thinker, he thought that it is important for us to be careful in our use of terms, but this was just one of his many tools. Rather than a formula or a methodology, Kongzi offers us the ideal of becoming a certain sort of person, the "noble" or "gentleman," whose insight cannot be fully codified. This is an ideal that ever draws us onward. We come to understand it better as we approach it, but we also realize that every formulation of it can only be partial and tentative. Although we must always move toward it, if we think we have attained it, we have not. As Kongzi's greatest disciple, Yan Hui, said: "The more I look up at it the higher it seems; the more I delve into it, the harder it becomes. Catching a glimpse of it before me, I then find it suddenly at my back" (9.11).

## II. RUISM AS A VIRTUE ETHIC

Since Kongzi is comparatively particularistic, he emphasizes becoming the sort of person who can discern and respond to complex and fluid situations. This leads naturally to an interest in the way of life of such a person, the virtues that contribute to leading such a life, the cultivation of those virtues, and (implicitly) how human nature allows us to cultivate those virtues and lead that life. To these topics we now turn.

### II.A. Flourishing

We do find in the received text of the *Analects* suggestions about what a flourishing life is. It is clear that Ruists agree with Platonistic and

Aristotelian virtue ethicists in holding that accumulating wealth, satisfying one's sensual desires, and enjoying social prestige are not necessarily to be eschewed in a flourishing life, but neither are such things considered high orders of good, or necessary for flourishing:

If wealth could be pursued in a proper manner, I would pursue it, even if that meant serving as an officer holding a whip at the entrance to the marketplace. If there is no proper manner in which to pursue it, however, then I would prefer to follow that which I love. (7.12)

Wealth and social eminence are things that all people desire, and yet unless they are acquired in the proper way I will not abide them. Poverty and disgrace are things that all people hate, and yet unless they are avoided in the proper way I will not despise them. (4.5; cf. 7.16)

A scholar-official who has set his heart upon the Way, but who is still ashamed of having shabby clothing or meager rations, is not worth engaging in discussion. (4.9)

However, the Ruist conception of flourishing is very unlike the best-known Western conceptions in a number of respects. For example, the Platonistic or Thomistic conceptions of flourishing are, in a sense, "other-worldly," whereas Ruism is (to use a rebarbative expression) "this-worldly." Both Plato and Aquinas hold that there is some other world, radically distinct from the material world in which we live, that there is individual survival after death, and that the greatest human flourishing can be attained only in this supermundane world. Philosophical Ruism does not necessarily deny that there may be spirits or some afterlife. However, Ruists do not hold that there is some world radically distinct from this one, and their ethics focuses on living well in this world of concrete, embodied people and relationships. This attitude is reflected in the following exchange:

Zilu asked about serving ghosts and spirits. The Master said, "You are not yet able to serve people – how could you be able to serve ghosts and spirits?"

"May I inquire about death?"

"You do not yet understand life – how could you possibly understand death?" (11.12)

Because of their two-world metaphysical views, Plato and Aquinas see the highest human flourishing as consisting in a kind of loving contemplation of some higher reality: either the Forms or God. (Although Aristotle's metaphysical picture is much more "this-worldly" than either Plato's or Aquinas's, Aristotle is notoriously torn between a conception of flourishing as political activity in this world and conceptions that emphasize

theoretical contemplation or contemplation of the gods.) Ruism, in contrast, does not hold the sort of metaphysical picture that would make sense out of pure contemplation of theoretical truth as a significant constituent of human flourishing. We do see, especially in later Ruism, the ideal of appreciating the beauty of the natural world, but even here it is not pure contemplation, but a matter of fitting in with the natural world harmoniously. And the object of this appreciation is something physical and natural rather than (as it would be for those in the Platonic tradition) abstract truths of mathematics or astronomy.

So what is the Ruist good life? It includes participation in ritual activities, ethically informed aesthetic appreciation and intellectual activity, acting for the good of others, and generally participating in relationships with other people, especially familial relationships.

### *II.A.1. Ritual*

“Ritual” and “rites” are common translations of the Chinese term “*lǐ* 禮.” But “ritual” is a highly disputed term. There is even debate about whether it is a useful category for understanding action at all.<sup>47</sup> One difficulty for us is that the Chinese term *li* is used to cover a broad range of activities, some of which more naturally fall under our category of “etiquette.” Thus, what kind of clothing to wear on particular occasions (10.19), as well as the proper attitude with which to talk with social superiors and subordinates (10.2), are matters of *li*. At other times, the *li* seem to be coextensive with ethics. Thus, Kongzi is reported to have told one of his disciples, “Do not look unless it is in accordance with ritual; do not listen unless it is in accordance with ritual; do not speak unless it is in accordance with ritual; do not move unless it is in accordance with ritual” (12.1). As Yearley sums it up, ritual “covers everything from solemn performance of an elaborate rite to the ‘excuse me’ after a sneeze.”<sup>48</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Goody, “Against ‘Ritual.’” I have found Kelly and Kaplan, “History, Structure and Ritual” and Bell, *Ritual Theory*, helpful as introductions to the issues regarding ritual and the social-scientific literature on it. (I find an unfortunate disciplinary segregation in discussions of ritual. For example, social scientists seem to never cite Fingarette’s *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred*, even though it anticipates Maurice Bloch and Stanley Tambiah in applying speech act theory to ritual. Similarly, most humanists seem unaware of anthropological work on ritual. Among the rare exceptions to these generalization are Campany, “Xunzi and Durkheim as Theorists of Ritual Practice,” and Radcliffe-Brown, “Religion and Society.”)

<sup>48</sup> Yearley, *Mencius and Aquinas*, p. 37. Pines offers an intriguing socio-historical explanation of the evolution of the notion of *li* (*Patterned Past*, pp. 89–104).

Nonetheless, I believe that it *is* useful for our purposes to think of *li* as “ritual.” To begin with, many of the activities that Ruists subsume under the term *li* are activities that we would identify as paradigmatic rituals:

“Sacrifice as if [they were] present” means that, when sacrificing to the spirits, you should comport yourself as if the spirits were present.

The Master said, “If I am not fully present at the sacrifice, it is as if I did not sacrifice at all.” (3.12)

Zigong wanted to do away with the practice of sacrificing a lamb to announce the beginning of the month.

The Master said, “Zigong! You regret the loss of the lamb, whereas I regret the loss of the rite.” (3.17)

Thinking about the role activities like these play in Ruism, about how that role is different from that of relevantly similar activities in other worldviews, and about why Ruists regard these activities as similar to some matters of etiquette and ethics may (and I hope will) prove very illuminating.

II.A.1.A. WHAT IS RITUAL? Ritual, as I shall discuss it here, is learned human activity that is regarded as sacred. Because ritual is seen as sacred, it is regarded as having an authority that is not reducible to that of human individuals.<sup>49</sup> This raises the question of what it is for something to be “sacred.” To regard something as sacred is to think that the proper attitude toward it is awe or reverence (*jìng* 敬). I can give examples of things that groups of people regard as sacred, or what people do, say, or feel when they revere something. But if I am asked to further *define* “reverence,” I’m not sure what I can say beyond, “It is the attitude one takes toward what one regards as sacred.” I think “sacred” is the sort of fundamental term that can be explained only by either example, metaphor, or other terms that form a chain of definitions that eventually comes back to the original term. But this is not necessarily a defect of the notion of the “sacred” or my characterization of it. In some sense, *all* terms can be characterized only by example, metaphor, or ultimately circular chains of definitions. (It’s just that in some cases this seems less frustrating because the chains are long enough and branch out more quickly into webs connecting terms together.)

<sup>49</sup> My debt here to Durkheim (*Elementary Forms of Religious Life*) is obvious, although I would not follow every detail of his account. (Because rituals are sacred, they are distinct from mere conventions and habits. Participation in a ritual could become habitual, though. In addition, one could see rituals as sanctified conventions. However, some traditions would reject the description of their rituals in this manner.)

Using a hermeneutic of suspicion, Maurice Bloch has argued that the authority attributed to ritual is a mask for the exercise of human authority. Bloch argues that ritual uses formalism and repetitiveness to make a social ideology (in the Marxist sense of that term) seem compelling and to rule out of bounds any intellectual challenge or argument: "ritual is a kind of tunnel into which one plunges, and where, since there is no possibility of turning either to right or left, the only thing to do is to follow."<sup>50</sup> It would be foolish to deny that rituals *can* have the functions Bloch suggests, and that they have performed these functions at various points in East Asian history. Inagaki's epic film *Chûshingura* (忠臣蔵) illustrates the exploitive potential of ritual in a Ruist-influenced society. The ceremonial requirements of a visit by an imperial delegation provide venal Lord Kira with tools that he uses in his attempts to extort from and humiliate noble Lord Asano. It is only when Asano violates ritual that he is able to avenge himself on Kira. When interrogated about his actions, Asano is speechless, illustrating the way in which ritual can silence dissent. Consequently, the price for Asano's violation is death.

However, I think it would be reductionistic to assume that the only functions that ritual can have are as a mask and instrument of coercive authority. As Stanley Tambiah observes, rituals *can*

take opposite turnings: to the right when they begin to lose their semantic component and come to serve mainly the pragmatic interests of authority, privilege, and sheer conservatism; and to the left when committed believers, faced with a decline of referential meaning . . . , strive to infuse purified meaning into traditional forms, as often happens during the effervescence of religious revival and reform.<sup>51</sup>

We should be familiar with these phenomena from our own recent history. Christianity has been used, for example, to justify slavery when that was the status quo, but it has also been a resource for many who have opposed slavery (like the white Quakers who risked their lives to assist the underground railroad). Furthermore, figures such as the Revs. William Sloan Coffin and Martin Luther King, Jr. were part of a Christian religious revival that struggled for progressive social goals.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, Christian

<sup>50</sup> Bloch, "Symbols, Song, Dance, and Features of Articulation," pp. 41–42. See also Bloch, "Disconnection between Power and Rank as a Process," pp. 78–81, and Bloch, "From Cognition to Ideology," pp. 122–23. Cf. Asad, "Anthropological Conceptions of Religion."

<sup>51</sup> Tambiah, "Performative Approach to Ritual," p. 166.

<sup>52</sup> Indeed, marches and sit-ins are themselves ritual acts. More precisely, each is a ritual activity as long as it is conducted with a sense of sacrality. Thus, King speaks of the need

anti-Semitism was obviously a factor in promoting Nazi oppression, but Christian teachings on love and self-sacrifice inspired some of those who died opposing the Nazis, like St. Maximilian Kolbe and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Tambiah's analysis seems especially helpful in understanding the following pregnant quotation from King, in which we find a call for a revivalistic turn, away from religious practice that is meaningless except as an instrument of privilege, and toward a reinvigoration of religious ritual through a deeper understanding of the meaning of those rituals and of the sacred texts:

There was a time when the church was very powerful. It was during that period when the early Christians rejoiced when they were deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed. In those days the church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was a thermostat that transformed the mores of society. Wherever the early Christians entered a town the power structure got disturbed and immediately sought to convict them for being "disturbers of the peace" and "outside agitators." But they went on with the conviction that they were "a colony of heaven," and had to obey God rather than man. They were small in number but big in commitment. They were too God-intoxicated to be "astronomically intimidated." They brought an end to such ancient evils as infanticide and gladiatorial contest. Things are different now. The contemporary church is often a weak, ineffectual voice with an uncertain sound. It is so often the arch-supporter of the status quo. . . . If the church of today does not recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early church, it will lose its authentic ring, forfeit the loyalty of millions, and be dismissed as an irrelevant social club with no meaning for the twentieth century.<sup>53</sup>

Similarly, Ruism, at its best, is revivalistic, rather than conservative. It calls on its followers to shake off mindless conformity to the degraded status quo, even when that status quo claims Ruism for its justification. Ruist revivalism recommends, instead, a commitment to the highest ideals within the tradition, which are often subversive of the status quo.

Tambiah writes that, in the "times of promise and hope" that characterize religious revivals,

the semantic meanings of words uttered and object-symbols and icons manipulated matter terribly, and the esoteric lore of doctrine and rite is taught with punctilious care to disciples. And the ambitious aim . . . is

for "a process of self-purification" before engaging in nonviolent protest ("Letter from Birmingham City Jail," p. 291). Without that sense, marches and sit-ins can degenerate into something else. This too illustrates Tambiah's point. Those for whom a sit-in is simply an excuse for hooliganism have lost touch with the sacred meanings of the "words," "object-symbols," and "icons" they employ.

<sup>53</sup> King, "Letter from Birmingham City Jail," p. 300.



pursued to breathe meaning and fervor into each article of faith and each act of communal worship.<sup>54</sup>

We see this in a famous example from *Analects* 9.3. Kongzi observes that, in performing a certain ritual, people have stopped using hemp caps and have switched to silk caps. He notes that this is more economical, so he goes along with the change. However, in another ritual that originally involved bowing *before* ascending the stairs into a hall, people have switched to bowing *after* getting to the top of the stairs. The difference may seem insignificant, but to Kongzi it reflects a lack of deference: people wish to bow at the top because then they are at the same level as those whom they bow to. Consequently, Kongzi says that, in this case, he will follow the old way of doing things. We see here that Ruism is not mindless conformity to the rituals of the past, but rather a thoughtful appropriation of them.

One of the issues that divides Bloch and Tambiah is the extent to which rituals have semantic, as opposed to more purely pragmatic, significance.<sup>55</sup> In other words, to what extent do rituals *mean* something, and to what extent do they *do* something? Furthermore, among theories that emphasize either meaning or doing, some use a hermeneutic of suspicion, whereas others use a hermeneutic of restoration. James Frazer and J. M. H. Beattie represent two extremes within a hermeneutics of restoration. Frazer seems to suggest that rituals are essentially (primitive) technologies for achieving goals such as good crops, health, wealth, and so forth. In contrast, Beattie (while recognizing that rituals also often have “practical” purposes) argues that what distinguishes them from other activities are their expressive and symbolic qualities. William Robertson Smith rejects both Frazer’s technological interpretation and Beattie’s interpretive approach, arguing that

the antique religions had for the most part no creed; they consisted entirely of institutions and practices. . . . as a rule we find that while the practice was rigorously fixed, the meaning attached to it was extremely vague, and the same rite was explained by different people in different ways, without any question of orthodoxy or heterodoxy arising in consequence.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Tambiah, “Performative Approach to Ritual,” pp. 165–66.

<sup>55</sup> “It is therefore misguided to argue, as some anthropologists have done, that religion is an explanation” (Bloch, “Symbols, Song, Dance and Features of Articulation,” p. 37). And see *ibid.* pp. 38–45. Contrast Tambiah’s criticisms of Bloch in Tambiah, “Performative Approach to Ritual” pp. 154–56.

<sup>56</sup> Frazer, *Golden Bough*. Beattie, “On Understanding Ritual.” Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, pp. 16–17.

I am inclined to agree with Durkheim that, at least in most cases, rituals make certain conceptions of the world seem compelling for individuals.<sup>57</sup> In particular, Durkheim sees ritual as expressing and reinforcing the ties that bind individuals together into society.<sup>58</sup> A. R. Radcliffe-Brown developed Durkheim's general approach (which came to be known as "functionalism") but suggested that ritual expresses and reinforces a sense of dependence on other people, groups, and forces.<sup>59</sup> In a similar vein, Geertz famously observes that rituals are models of and models for: models of, because they are the embodiment of "an image of cosmic order – a world view," and models for, because they induce "a set of moods and motivations – an ethos."<sup>60</sup> But Geertz also makes something explicit: because of social change, there can come to be an "incongruity" between rituals and social organization.<sup>61</sup> Rituals that had produced harmony in the social structure in which they originally developed may, as the structure changes, fail to do so, and even produce disharmony.

Ritual exists in many forms in many different cultures, so perhaps we should not seek one model that is equally illuminating of every manifestation of ritual. In one culture, ritual may be, as Frazer suggested, merely an instrumentality. In another culture, ritual may be purely expressive. Indeed, ritual may function both ways within a single culture, instrumental for one group, expressive for another.<sup>62</sup> It might be better, then, to discuss some of the ways in which ritual *can* function. Ritual can express attitudes toward, or conceptions of, the world. The practice of ritual can reinforce those attitudes and conceptions. Insofar as ritual expresses and reinforces human attitudes and conceptions, it can perform various

<sup>57</sup> Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. For a brief discussion of the significance of Durkheim's views on ritual, see Bell, *Ritual Theory*, pp. 23–25. Ernest Gellner has observed that Durkheim's views on the relationship between rituals and concepts are much like Wittgenstein's views on the relationship between a "form of life" and concepts ("Concepts and Society," pp. 23–24n1).

<sup>58</sup> Philip J. Ivanhoe has used (in conversation) an analogy to explicate the two-way relationship between rituals and mental states. Juggling is an *expression* of our dexterity and coordination, but it is also something that develops and preserves those qualities. Similarly, ritual expresses certain attitudes and conceptions of the world, but it also helps cultivate those attitudes in us.

<sup>59</sup> Radcliffe-Brown, "Religion and Society," pp. 175–76.

<sup>60</sup> Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," p. 118.

<sup>61</sup> Geertz, "Ritual and Social Change," p. 169.

<sup>62</sup> Perhaps there is no ritual act that is purely instrumental, but the instrumental aspect may predominate in some cases. For example, as a child, I had a friend who put holy water on his toy cars to make them go faster. I do not think it is too far-fetched to conceive of this as a (misguided) ritual act, but one of an almost purely instrumental sort. In contrast, some liberal protestants regard rituals such as baptism as almost purely expressive.

functions. These functions can be insidious: ritual can be a tool for enforcing conformity to the raw exercise of power. However, ritual might also have positive effects: it can help bring about a beneficent harmony in both an individual's psychology as well as in society as a whole.<sup>63</sup> A ritual may lack an accepted interpretation among participants, but because of the relationship between ritual and human attitudes and conceptions, ritual may be interpreted, using a hermeneutic of restoration, in symbolic terms (similar to the way in which one might interpret a novel, film, or other text).<sup>64</sup>

Rituals (like everything else) exist in many forms at different times, even within "one culture." However, among participants, rituals are typically presented as having an ideal, traditional form. Deviation from this form is seen as undesirable, perhaps even impossible. This conception is part of what accounts for the authority of ritual. The authority of ritual is two-edged, for this authority is why rituals *may* have a negative effect, by preserving existing injustices. But it is also why rituals *may* have a positive effect, by calling people to realize the values implicit in their rituals.

II.A.1.B. RITUAL IN RUISM. Given the intrinsic interest and potential importance of ritual, it is striking that it is central to Ruism yet almost absent from the Aristotelian and Platonistic versions of virtue ethics. It is therefore unsurprising that MacIntyre remarks, "About this importance [of ritual] and about the relationship between respect for ceremonial forms and the practice of the virtues in general we Aristotelians do have a good deal to learn from Confucians, and I hope that we are duly grateful."<sup>65</sup> So what *do* Ruists have to teach about ritual?

One of the most striking (and oft-cited) passages on Kongzi's attitude toward ritual is 10.12:

He would not sit unless his mat was straight.

This line is sometimes used to portray Kongzi as perversely punctilious to the point of absurdity.<sup>66</sup> However, Ruists see ritual as performing several

<sup>63</sup>Malinowski (*Magic, Science and Religion*) emphasizes how ritual meets the needs of the individual, whereas Durkheim (*Elementary Forms of Religious Life*) emphasizes how ritual meets the needs of society. On this point, see Geertz, "Ritual and Social Change," pp. 142–43.

<sup>64</sup>Beattie emphasizes the symbolic aspects of ritual, but he suggests that ritual is closer to nonlinguistic art forms such as music (Beattie, "Ritual and Social Change," pp. 65–66).

<sup>65</sup>MacIntyre, "Once More on Confucian and Aristotelian Conceptions of the Virtues," p. 158.

<sup>66</sup>See, for example, Hoff, *Tao of Pooh*, p. 3.

important roles. As Radcliffe-Brown pointed out, the “functionalist” account of ritual was anticipated more than two thousand years ago by the Ruist Xunzi.<sup>67</sup>

Xunzi clearly would reject Frazer’s account of ritual as a form of technology:

One performs the rain sacrifice and it rains. Why? I say: There is no special reason why. It is the same as when one does not perform the rain sacrifice and it rains anyway. When the sun and moon suffer eclipse, one tries to save them. When Heaven sends drought, one performs the rain sacrifice. One performs divination and only then decides on important affairs. But this is not for the sake of getting what one seeks, but rather to give things proper form. Thus, the gentleman looks upon this as proper form, but the common people look upon it as connecting with spirits. If one looks upon it as proper form, then one will have good fortune.<sup>68</sup>

For Xunzi, “proper form” is connected with finding a way to express our emotions:

In every case, ritual begins in that which must be released, reaches full development in giving it proper form, and finishes in providing it satisfaction. And so when ritual is at its most perfect, the requirements of inner dispositions and proper form are both completely fulfilled.<sup>69</sup>

Among the most important feelings that must be given proper form are the strong feelings of those who grieve for departed loved ones:

Man’s feeling for his parents knows no limit until the day they die. Will we follow foolish, ignorant, perverse men? Those who have died that morning they forget by that evening. If one gives way to this, then one will not even be as good as the birds and beasts. *How could such people come together and live in groups without there being chaos?* Will we follow cultivated gentlemen? For them the twenty-five months of the three-year mourning period passes by as quickly as a galloping horse glimpsed through a crack.<sup>70</sup>

Notice that, in the preceding text, Xunzi acknowledges that it is possible to fail to have strong feelings of grief. However, he seems to be suggesting that this is not what is most common among humans. Furthermore, in

<sup>67</sup> Radcliffe-Brown, “Religion and Society,” especially pp. 157–60. As we shall see in Chapter 4, §VI.B, Mengzi anticipated some of Xunzi’s views on the expressive function of ritual.

<sup>68</sup> Xunzi 17, “Discourse on Heaven,” *Readings*, p. 272.

<sup>69</sup> Xunzi 19, “Discourse on Ritual,” *Readings*, p. 276. (“Dispositions” is qing 情, which might also be translated, in this context, as “emotions.”)

<sup>70</sup> Xunzi 19, “Discourse on Ritual,” *Readings*, p. 283. Emphasis mine.

clear anticipation of the functionalist account, Xunzi links the mourning rituals with avoiding social chaos. In a general comment on the importance of ritual, Xunzi remarks,

[Ritual] *achieves proper form for love and respect*, and it brings to perfection the beauty of carrying out the standards of righteousness. . . . And so, fine ornaments, music, and happiness are that by which one responds to peaceful events and that by which one pays homage to good fortune. Coarse mourning garments, weeping, and sorrow are that by which one responds to threatening events and that by which one pays homage to ill fortune.<sup>71</sup>

It is not clear how much of this Kongzi himself clearly recognized (or even would endorse). In one passage, when he is asked the meaning of a particular sacrifice, he expresses ignorance, combined with a sense of awe at the ritual's hidden meaning (3.11). (One is reminded here of William Robertson Smith's comments on the importance of ritual *practice* over ritual *interpretation*.) In another passage (17.21), Kongzi is reported to have offered a justification of the mourning ritual for parents: he notes that the ritual should be performed only as long as one has the appropriate feelings of loss. But he adds that a good person will have these feelings for (at least) the ritually prescribed amount of time. This expressivist account of ritual captures part of what we find later in Xunzi and Beattie. However, this passage is in the stratum of the *Analects* identified by Cui Shu as a late addition, so we cannot be sure that Kongzi would agree with it.<sup>72</sup>

Herbert Fingarette has been one of the most eloquent recent defenders of the Ruist emphasis on ritual, and he has made at least three lasting contributions to our understanding of it. First, Fingarette sees in Ruism a recognition of the insights made, millennia later, in the speech-act theory of philosophers such as J. L. Austin. Austin recognized that there are utterances that "are not statements *about* some act or inviting some action; instead they are the very execution of the act itself."<sup>73</sup> The relevance of this to ritual is not immediately obvious, but Fingarette goes

<sup>71</sup> Xunzi 19, "Discourse on Ritual," *Readings*, p. 280. Emphasis mine.

<sup>72</sup> Kongzi's disciple Youzi said (1.12) that "When it comes to the practice of ritual, it is harmonious ease that is to be valued," and he remarked that one will be unsuccessful if one tries to achieve harmony without ritual. This may be a reference to the use of ritual in achieving social harmony. (But see Kupperman, "Naturalness Revisited," for an alternative reading.)

<sup>73</sup> Fingarette, *Confucius*, p. 12. Emphasis in original.

on to argue that “performative utterances” are possible only in specific ritual contexts.<sup>74</sup>

Fingarette’s second major insight draws our attention to three aspects of *li*: it refers to a broad range of distinctively human activities; it is almost always enacted in social contexts; and it is sacred. Consequently, conceiving of social activities in terms of *li* encourages us to see “human community as Holy Rite.”<sup>75</sup> When we do so, activities in concert with other humans are seen to have radiant beauty as well as “inherent and ultimate dignity.”<sup>76</sup> This contrasts with the view, common in the West since Thomas Hobbes, that individuals are fundamentally unconnected, and that society has value only as a tool for meeting their self-interested needs.

Finally, Fingarette notes that ritual provides a mode of interaction between humans that is neither self-conscious nor coercive. His example is simple, yet compelling:

I see you on the street; I smile, walk toward you, put out my hand to shake yours. And behold – without any command, stratagem, force, special tricks or tools, without any effort on my part to make you do so, you spontaneously turn toward me, return my smile, raise your hand toward mine. We shake hands – not by my pulling your hand up and down or you pulling mine but by spontaneous and perfect cooperative action. Normally we do not notice the subtlety and amazing complexity of this coordinated “ritual” act.<sup>77</sup>

As Fingarette observes, the effort to describe the “subtlety and complexity” of this social act and to try to explain the variations (shaking a man’s hand vs. a woman’s, shaking an opponent’s hand before a game vs. an old friend’s hand vs. a respected mentor’s hand, etc.) would seem as

<sup>74</sup> “I cannot effectively go through the ceremony of bequeathing my servant to someone if, in our society, there is no accepted convention of slavery; I cannot bet two dollars if no one completes the bet by accepting; I cannot legally plead ‘Guilty’ to a crime while eating dinner at home” (Fingarette, *Confucius*, pp. 12–13).

<sup>75</sup> Fingarette, *Confucius*, p. 1 (chapter title). See also *ibid.*, pp. 15–17.

<sup>76</sup> Fingarette, *Confucius*, p. 16.

<sup>77</sup> Fingarette, *Confucius*, p. 9. Two unsatisfying aspects of Fingarette’s account deserve comment. First, shaking hands is not a ritual action since it is not regarded as sacred. Fingarette sometimes is unclear about the distinction between ritual and convention (e.g., *ibid.*, p. 14). Second, Fingarette would describe the fact that you raise your hand to meet mine as “magic” because he uses that term in a very idiosyncratic way (*ibid.*, p. 3).

convoluted and “quaint” as do the descriptions of ritual found in Book 10 of the *Analects*.<sup>78</sup>

Fingarette’s contribution to our understanding of the role of ritual in Ruism has been immense. However, I believe that he has missed, or at least failed to fully appreciate, an additional role that ritual has in Ruism: inculcating, expressing, and maintaining human attitudes and worldviews. Fingarette misses this point because he reads the *Analects* in terms drawn from the philosophical behaviorism of works such as Gilbert Ryle’s *The Concept of Mind*. If Fingarette’s claim is that the *Analects* does not show evidence of the sort of introspection we find in Augustine or in Descartes (who are Ryle’s targets), then he is quite right (but then Fingarette is attacking a straw man, because no one attributes to Kongzi Augustinian introspection or Cartesian subjectivity). However, at times Fingarette seems uncomfortable with the use of even the most basic emotional vocabulary in discussing the *Analects*.<sup>79</sup>

In contrast with Fingarette, I would say that, as we participate in an external order maintained by human agency yet characterized by sacrality, we internalize values expressed by that order. This is, I take it, part of the force of Kongzi’s comment that, “To overcome oneself and to turn toward the rites is to become humane” (12.1).<sup>80</sup> In other words, humans

<sup>78</sup>Fingarette, *Confucius*, p. 10.

<sup>79</sup>Fingarette, *Confucius*, pp. 43–45. Fingarette’s views on this point are well criticized in Schwartz, *World of Thought in Ancient China*, pp. 71–75. See also Goldin, “A Mind Body Problem in the *Zhuangzi*” Toward the end of his life, A. C. Graham suggested that those who disagreed with Fingarette on this topic were generally Sinologists whose criticisms “stray off into irrelevant” topics because of a simple “misunderstanding” of what is at issue (review of *The World of Thought in Ancient China*, p. 795). Speaking as a philosopher who is conversant with Ryle’s views and who reads Chinese, I have to say that, for what it is worth, I don’t find Fingarette’s view on this topic compelling either.

<sup>80</sup>克己復禮為仁。On “humaneness” (rén 仁), see §II.B in this chapter. Slingerland (*Analects*) has “Restraining yourself and returning to the rites constitutes [humaneness].” This is a good translation, but I prefer to retain the root sense of kè 克, which is “to defeat in battle.” Fù 復 is tricky. In any other context, “to return” would be the obvious meaning. But what would that mean here? It could mean that *society* used to practice the rites, and we must return to the old ways. But the passage seems to be focusing on what the *individual* should do. *Fu* is typically glossed as fǎn 反, which can mean “to return.” But *fan* can also mean “to turn around.” Consequently, I take the point to be that we must reverse our orientation so that it is toward humaneness. Wéi 為 can be a simple equational verb, but it can also have the sense of “to become.” Slingerland’s translation is also *consistent* with my interpretation overall. But I think that my translation of this line is slightly more accurate and fits in with what I see as the role of ritual in the process of *becoming* virtuous. (The only translators I have found who seem to agree with my reading are Brooks and Brooks, *Original Analects*.)

are originally resistant to ritual, so one must “overcome” one’s original self and “turn” oneself around, toward ritual.

In submitting ourselves to the ritual order, we turn away from our concern in satisfying our self-interested, partisan, and anxious desires. This is why we must approach ritual matters with “reverence” (jìng 敬, 3.26, 6.22). As we participate in ritual with this attitude, we imbibe values such as humility and deference. Because the appropriate attitude toward ritual is reverence, ritual is authoritative. And, as Fingarette observes, when ritual functions properly, it calls forth a response from others. Because of this evocative aspect of ritual, and because it is seen as having authority that transcends the individual, ritual helps maintain and strengthen communities.<sup>81</sup>

The society in which Kongzi lived seems to have suffered from incongruity between ritual and social structure (like the kind that Geertz documents). This is evidenced by Kongzi’s complaints that local rulers were usurping rituals that were the prerogative of the Zhou king (3.1, 3.2). The Ruist response to this incongruity was (as with the movement led by Martin Luther King, Jr.) an attempt to transform society in beneficial ways through a renewed understanding of and reinvigorated commitment to the deeper significance of the rituals.

### *II.A.2. Living Well*

Because ritual is, from the perspective of Western philosophy, such a challengingly new concept, we have had to spend much time explaining it. But ritual activities are just one aspect of the Ruist conception of living well.

Aesthetic appreciation – including the appreciation of music and poetry – is another part of a good life:

When the Master was in the state of Qi, he heard the Shao music, and for three months after did not even notice the taste of meat. He said, “I never imagined that music could be so sublime.” (7.14; cf. 7.32)

<sup>81</sup> The late Paul Desjardins introduced me to a wonderful example of this: the Shikinen Sengū, a Japanese ritual in which the Ise Daijingu (the Grand Shrine of Shintō at Ise) is completely rebuilt every twenty years. Desjardins noted that this activity reaffirms the identity of the community on a regular basis and gives everyone in the community a chance to participate: professionals raise funds and solve organizational and engineering problems, skilled craftsmen build specialized traditional items (including purely ritual objects representing the traditions of Japan), laborers toil, average citizens take part in pulling the foundation pillars to the site, Shintō priests bless the building at various stages, children bring stones for the grounds, and so forth. (See *Sixty-first Performance of the Shikinen Senguu in Ise*.)



For Kongzi, music, poetry, and ritual were closely related, because poetry was typically sung, and performed as part of ceremonies. It is not clear from the *Analects* whether Kongzi was aware of, or amenable to, other kinds of art. However, later Ruists prized a wide variety of artistic tastes and activities. Wu Jingzi's eighteenth-century novel *Rulin waishi* ("An Unauthorized History of the Ruists") is an ironic criticism of hypocrisy and vice, especially among the scholar-class. He portrays officials who, though supposedly the paragons of the Ruist political and education system, revel in power, prestige, and wealth, ignoring self-cultivation and the needs of others. (The very opposite of what Kongzi taught!) We also see impoverished scholars who become just like the people who exploited them as soon as they are given a chance. But the novel is ultimately a critique of superficial Ruism from a more profound and genuine Ruist perspective. And the handful of admirable figures in the novel are noteworthy for their aesthetic skills in poetry and the four accomplishments of "zither, go, calligraphy and painting" (qínqíshūhuà 琴棋書畫).<sup>82</sup>

Kongzi seems to have viewed beauty as separable, at least to some extent, from goodness: "The Master said of the Shao music, 'It is perfectly beautiful, and also perfectly good.' He said of the Wu music, 'It is perfectly beautiful, but not perfectly good'" (3.25). The Shao represented the peaceful transition of power from King Yao to King Shun, whereas the Wu represented the military victor of King Wu over tyrant Zhou. Although Wu's actions were warranted, they were still tainted by their association with the use of military force. This passage raises many interesting questions. Given how the Ruist tradition viewed King Wu and tyrant Zhou, how could the War Dance *not* be perfectly good? After all, King Wu was Virtuous, whereas tyrant Zhou tortured and killed his own subjects. By attacking tyrant Zhou, King Wu ended his reign of terror and brought safety and happiness to the people. Is it possible that King Wu was faced with a tragic choice? Was he obligated by righteousness to remain loyal to tyrant Zhou, since tyrant Zhou was still the reigning king, but also obligated by benevolence to attack him and bring an end to his misrule? Unfortunately, this is one of many topics on which the *Analects* is enigmatic.

In any case, it is important not to conflate the Ruist conception of beauty with superficially similar Western ones. An extremely influential

<sup>82</sup> See Wu, *The Scholars*, chapters 1 and 55, which frame the novel with accounts of virtuous individuals such as these, who are regarded as eccentrics by the hypocritical society in which they live.

conception of aesthetics in the West (with roots in Kant) is expressed by the slogan “art for art’s sake.” This Western conception severs any *direct* connection between the aesthetic and ethical qualities of something. In contrast, Ruists typically find beauty in what is ethically exemplary, and they hold that appreciating such beauty is itself ethically inspiring:<sup>83</sup>

To dwell in humaneness is what is beautiful. (4.1)

The *Odes* number several hundred, and yet can be judged with a single phrase: “Oh, they will not lead you astray.” (2.2)<sup>84</sup>

The “Cry of the Osprey” [the first of the *Odes*] expresses joy without becoming licentious, and expresses sorrow without falling into excessive pathos. (3.20; cf. 3.23)

Study was required to learn the rituals, music, and poetry. It was also required to understand the history and traditions that Kongzi transmitted (7.1). Understanding the past requires hard scholarly work (2.23, 3.9). Thus, although Ruists eschew purely theoretical contemplation, they clearly see a flourishing life as having an intellectual component of a sort:

To learn and then to have occasion to practice what you have learned – is this not satisfying? (1.1)

But note that this study is to be applied. Education aims to produce a “gentleman,” who can live a flourishing life in this world.

Ruism has long emphasized concern for other people and one’s obligation to try to make the world a better place:

Zilu asked about the gentleman.

The Master said, “He cultivates himself in order to achieve reverence. . . . He cultivates himself in order to bring peace to others. . . . He cultivates himself in order to bring peace to the people. Cultivating oneself and thereby bringing peace to the people is something even a Yao or a Shun would find difficult.” (14.42; cf. 5.26)

Kongzi’s disciple Zixia even went as far as to say, “Within the four seas, all are brothers” (12.5). Zixia’s comment goes further than most Ruists

<sup>83</sup> My views on this topic have been influenced by a stimulating paper by Christian Wenzel, “Beauty in Kant and Confucius.” Kant does see an *indirect* connection between morality and aesthetics, but his view is too complex to summarize here. See Wenzel, *Introduction to Kant’s Aesthetics*.

<sup>84</sup> The *Odes* (Shījīng 詩經) is a collection of poetry that was already very old by Kongzi’s time and was treated as a classic by him and later Ruists.

would be comfortable with, because it is in tension with the doctrine of “graded love” (which has been characteristic of Ruist ethics throughout its history). Graded love is the doctrine that one has agent-relative obligations toward, and should have greater emotional concern for, those who are bound to one by special relationships, such as those between ruler and minister, father and son, husband and wife, elder and younger brother, and between friends.<sup>85</sup> Kongzi expressed his commitment to the doctrine of graded love in the following famous passage from the *Analec*s:

The Lord of She said to Kongzi, “Among my people there is one we call ‘Upright Gong.’ When his father stole a sheep, he reported him to the authorities.”

Kongzi replied, “Among my people, those we consider ‘upright’ are different from this: fathers cover up for their sons, and sons cover up for their fathers. ‘Uprightness’ is to be found in this.” (13.18)

From a purely impersonal perspective, it seems that the right thing to do would be to apprehend and punish the thieving father. (Ruists consider it a sign of bad government if order must be maintained largely through law and punishment, but there is never any suggestion that punishment should be abolished in general.) However, Kongzi commends a son who acts in accordance with the fact that it is *his father* who is under threat of punishment.

The Ruist doctrine of graded love seems to capture the commonsense intuitions that many of us have, both in China and in the West. Imagine how you would react if someone told you, in an indignant tone, “People are going hungry tonight in New York, and Bryan isn’t doing anything about it!” I think most people would *not* take this to indicate a particularly serious character flaw in Bryan, and would perhaps respond to the statement with the tepid agreement that, Yes, we should *all* do more about the problem of hunger in the United States. But suppose someone told you, “Bryan’s *father* is going hungry tonight in New York, and he isn’t doing

<sup>85</sup> These are sometimes called the “five relations” and are mentioned in *Zhongyong* 20 and in *Mengzi* 3A4 (with “elder and younger” replacing “elder and younger brother” in the latter text). On “agent-relative obligations,” see Chapter 1, §II.A. “Graded love,” “differentiated love,” and “love with distinctions” have become the standard phrases in English for Ruist agent-relative ethical obligations. (They are loosely based on a phrase from *Mengzi* 3A5, where someone arguing *against* the Ruist view states, ài wú chādēng 愛無差等, “love is without gradations.”) Graded love has some similarities to what Michael Slote calls “balanced caring” (*Morals from Motives*, pp. 63–91).

anything about it!" If this were true, and if there were no extraordinary explanation for Bryan's behavior, most of us would regard his behavior as reflecting a heinous vice.

For Kongzi, a flourishing life possesses a joy that can survive adversity:

The gentleman is relaxed and at ease, while the petty man is anxious and full of worry. (7.37; cf. 9.29)

Nonetheless, a virtuous person will not (unlike the Western Stoics) strive to be unaffected by the evil and suffering in the world:

When Yan Hui passed away, the Master cried for him excessively. The disciples reproved him, saying, "Master, surely you are showing excessive grief!"

The Master replied, "Am I showing excessive grief? Well, for whom *would* I show excessive grief, if not for this man?" (11.10; cf. 4.21, 11.9)

What is the "order" among these aspects of a flourishing life? This is one of the issues that later Ruists have debated: are some merely means to others? Are they instrumental means or constitutive means? We see this sort of debate going on already among Kongzi's immediate disciples in one of the historically later parts of the *Analects*:

Ziyou said, "Among the disciples of Zixia, the younger ones are fairly competent when it comes to tasks such as mopping and sweeping, answering summons, and entering and retiring from formal company, but these are all superficialities. They are completely at a loss when it comes to mastering the basics. Why is this?"

When Zixia heard of this, he remarked, "Alas! Ziyou seems to have missed the point. Whose disciples will be first to be taught the Way of the gentleman, and then in the end grow tired of it? It is like the grass and the trees: you make distinctions between them according to their kind. The Way of the gentleman, how can it be slandered so? Starting at the beginning and working through to the end – surely this describes none other than the sage!" (19.12)

Unfortunately, in order to know the relative importance for Kongzi himself of the various activities in a flourishing life, we would need to solve the thorny textual issues I have opted to leave aside.

In summary, for Ruists (and here I will hazard generalizing over the more than two millennia history of the movement) the good life involves participation in communal ritual activities, aesthetic appreciation,

intellectual activities (but always with an ultimately practical aim), caring for and benefiting others (with greater concern for and obligations to those bound to one by special relations such as kinship and friendship), the joy that comes from virtuous activity (even in the face of adversity), but also appropriate sadness at loss.

## II.B. The Virtues

A large number of virtues have played an important role in the history of Ruism: rén 仁 (“humaneness” or “benevolence”), yì 義 (“righteousness”), lǐ 禮 (“propriety”), zhì 智 (“wisdom,” sometimes written 知), zhōng 忠 (“devotion”), xìn 信 (“faithfulness”), yǒng 勇 (“courage”), and xiào 孝 (“filial piety”). Some of these translations are fairly accurate, others are merely “tags” for want of a better translation. “Benevolence,” for example, is a good translation of *ren* in some contexts, but it is misleading in others. Each of the preceding Chinese terms is found in the *Analects*. However, some are not as central in the *Analects* as they would become in later Ruist thought, other virtues are emphasized more in the *Analects* than in later texts, and some of the preceding terms clearly mean something different in the *Analects* from what they later would.

The School of the Way Ruists essentially adopted Mengzi’s list of four cardinal virtues – benevolence, righteousness, wisdom, and propriety (*ren*, *yì*, *lǐ* and *zhì*) – but added faithfulness (*xìn*). However, this is clearly not Kongzi’s list of cardinal virtues. For example, *lǐ* originally referred to “the rites” (which are a set of practices, and not a virtue per se), and this is clearly its sense throughout the *Analects*. But when used by Mengzi and School of the Way Ruists as a virtue term, *lǐ* often refers to a disposition connected with following the rites. (When used in this sense I render it “propriety.”)<sup>86</sup>

Another term whose sense evolves over time is rén 仁, which is perhaps the most important virtue term in the *Analects*. *Ren* is used in both a narrow and in a broad sense.<sup>87</sup> In its narrow sense, *ren* is roughly equivalent to the later sense of “benevolence” and consists in “loving others” (12.22). However, in its broad sense it seems to refer to the summation

<sup>86</sup> See the discussion in Chapter 4, §V.C.

<sup>87</sup> See Shun, *Mencius*, pp. 23–24 for more discussion and references to the relevant secondary literature. Another textual issue jumps out to bite us: does the narrower use of *ren* reflect usage after the time of Kongzi (perhaps even a Mohist influence)? Is the broader use Kongzi’s own conception?

of all human virtue (including, but not limited to, benevolence). In this latter sense the term presents some difficulties of translation. In their *Analects* translations, Arthur Waley and Edward Slingerland use “Goodness,” which is quite workable. (The capital “G” is important, as “good” with a lowercase “g” has to be reserved for shàn 善, the generic term for good in Classical Chinese.) I shall translate the term as “humaneness” when discussing Kongzi. “Humaneness” is like “ren” in two important respects: part of the meaning of each term is benevolence, and each term is etymologically related to the word for “human” in their respective languages. (仁 rén is a combination of the characters 人 rén, “person, human,” and 二 èr, “two.”)

Although benevolence seems to be a connotation of even the broad sense of the term, later, perhaps under the influence of Mohist thought, “ren” was increasingly used to refer to benevolence specifically. This is normally its sense for Mengzi. Consequently, I shall render “ren” as “benevolence” when discussing the Mohists and Mengzi. (Keep in mind, though, that this benevolence was “impartial” for the Mohists but “graded” for Ruists like Mengzi.)

Kongzi is chary of attributing humaneness to any particular person. This is somewhat surprising since he generally seems willing to make ethical judgments about himself and others. Presumably, Kongzi’s reluctance to ascribe humaneness is partly because the presence of other virtues is insufficient for the ascription of humaneness: “Those who are humane will necessarily be courageous; those who are courageous will not necessarily be humane” (14.4). Perhaps more importantly, complete human goodness manifests itself in often surprising ways in manifold situations. Thus, we cannot be sure, from someone’s previous behavior, that she genuinely has humaneness.

*Yi*, as a quality of acts, is a term whose “thin” sense is fairly consistent over time: “Yì 義 is what is yí 宜, ‘appropriate’” (*The Mean* 20). For Ruists, what is “appropriate” will take into account one’s social role, so it is “agent-relative.” Although *yì* will sometimes involve obligations and other times prohibitions, my sense is that it is overall more like an agent-relative *prohibition* to avoid certain kinds of conduct. (In contrast, *ren*, when used in its narrow sense as benevolence, is primarily an agent-relative *obligation* to benefit others.) There is no really satisfactory translation for *yì*, but it is standardly given the tag “righteousness.” *Yì* can also be a term that refers to a virtue, the stable disposition to perform acts that are *yì*. D. C. Lau has argued that, in the *Analects*, *yì* “is basically a character of acts and

its application to agents is derivative.”<sup>88</sup> If Lau is right, then although the term frequently occurs in the *Analects*, *yi* is not one of Kongzi’s primary virtue terms, per se. (In the Ruism of the Mengzian tradition, though, *yi* becomes primarily a virtue term.)

It is not clear that Kongzi had any conception of the cardinal virtues. Rather, Kongzi stresses different virtues in different passages. As we saw above, 4.15 suggests that devotion (*zhōng* 忠) is *the* cardinal virtue, when used in conjunction with reciprocity (*shù* 恕). I do not class reciprocity, per se, as a virtue, since it seems to be more a “technique” (*fāng* 方) for thinking about others (as is suggested by *Analects* 6.30). Although I argued above that *zhong* is not *as* important as 4.15 indicates, it clearly is one of the most important virtues for Kongzi. It is reported in no fewer than three passages that Kongzi tells us to “Emphasize devotion and faithfulness” (1.8, 9.25, 12.10). Devotion is a commitment to the interests of someone else, especially in cases where this conflicts with one’s personal or partisan interests. This overlaps with what we would think of as loyalty in many cases, and this is the sense that “*zhong*” later comes to have. Faithfulness is primarily fidelity to words. Indeed, the character itself (信) is compounded out of the characters for person (人) and speech (言) – a person standing by his words, as it were. But fidelity to words has three “parts” (Chapter 1, §II.B.2). The most obvious aspect is faithfulness in the sense of honesty: doing what one says one will do, and not promising more than one can deliver (1.13, 5.10). Second, faithfulness implies a sort of obedience: doing what one’s lord commands one to do. This obedience is related to the third aspect of faithfulness: fidelity to the words and teachings of the sages of the past, so Kongzi can say, “I trust in (*xin*) and am fond of the ancients” (7.1). Neither devotion nor faithfulness is blind; each is ethically informed: “If you love someone, can you fail to make him work hard? If you are devoted to someone, can you fail to educate him?” (14.7). Ideally, devotion and faithfulness will complement one another, as is suggested by the frequent pairing of *zhong* and *xin* in the *Analects*. But the two can seemingly pull in very different directions. So when, in 607 B.C.E., the lord of Jin ordered Chu Ni to murder the capable and upright minister Zhao Dun, the *Zuozhuan* reports that Chu Ni sighed and said, “One who [like Zhao Dun] does not

<sup>88</sup> Lau, *Analects*, p. 27. For a contrasting view, see Shun, *Mencius*, pp. 25–26. Shun also suggests that the term had, from a very early time, a connection with avoiding shameful behavior. (We shall see in Chapter 4, §V.B, that this is clearly its sense for Mengzi.)

forget respect and reverence is the people's ruler. To kill the people's ruler is to not show devotion; to cast aside my lord's command is to not be faithful. It is better to die than to have either one of these." In order to escape this dilemma, Chu Ni killed himself.<sup>89</sup>

Kongzi does not explain how to resolve tensions like this. Perhaps he would have advised Chu Ni to simply resign his official position, as Kongzi himself reportedly did when his ruler neglected affairs of state to cavort with dancing girls sent as a gift by another state (*Analects* 18.4; cf. *Mengzi* 6B6). In any case, Kongzi seems, for the most part, to act as if faithfulness involves an unbending commitment to honesty. His use of "skillful means" (*upāya*) in answering questions is not a violation of this. When he tells one disciple that he should immediately put into practice what he has learned, but tells another disciple that he should not (11.22), he is not lying or being unfaithful to either disciple. He is giving the advice that is faithful to each of them and their individual needs. This is an important point because *upāya* in the Buddhist tradition paradigmatically involves telling outright falsehoods, but for the benefit of those one addresses, who lack the enlightenment required to appreciate the full truth. (The classic example is the father of many children whose house is on fire: he yells to them that there is a wagon of toys and treats outside, so that they will all quickly leave the house. Though he had lied to them about the wagon, he had done what was in their best interests.) Kongzi might seem to be engaging in *upāya* in the strict sense in one passage, 17.20, but even here he makes a point of revealing the lie to the person almost immediately.

Interestingly, "zhong" and "xin" are additional examples of virtue terms whose role has changed radically over time within the Ruist tradition. "Zhong" becomes a much less central term in the Mengzian tradition (although it is a common and central term in the essays of Xunzi). For Mengzi, I think that the role of devotion (*zhong*) was absorbed by other virtues, particularly benevolence and righteousness. Faithfulness (*xin*) seems to have only a peripheral role in the thought of Mengzi himself: he does not list it as one of his four cardinal virtues of benevolence, righteousness, wisdom, and ritual propriety, nor does he associate it with any of the "beginnings" of these virtues, which he mentions in his passages 2A6 and 6A6. Furthermore, Mengzi seems much more comfortable than

<sup>89</sup> *Zuo*zhuan, Duke Xuan, Year 2. Cf. Legge, *Ch'un Ts'ew*, p. 290. I am indebted to the discussion of the relationship between *zhong* and *xin* in Pines, *Foundations of Confucian Thought*, pp. 146–53, and Schaberg, *Patterned Past*, pp. 156–57.



Kongzi with what we might call “therapeutic lying.” He explicitly states in 4B11, “As for great people, their words do not have to be faithful, and their actions do not have to bear fruit. They rest only in righteousness” (cf. *Analects* 13.20). Mengzi illustrates this adage himself: he lies to King Xuan of Qi, telling him that there are no historical records of the military rulers Huan of Qi and Wen of Jin, when he says elsewhere that there are such records (cf. 1A7.1–2 and 4B21). Mengzi tells this falsehood because he wishes to distract Xuan from the topic of rule by force and get him to focus on rule by Virtue.

The School of the Way Ruists again elevated faithfulness to the status of a cardinal virtue (along with Mengzi’s four virtues, giving them a total of five cardinal virtues), but their emphasis on faithfulness must be understood in terms of their own baroque metaphysics. As A. C. Graham explained, the Cheng brothers and their followers identified each of the virtues with an aspect of the universal *lǐ* 理, “pattern,” within oneself. They carefully distinguished these principles from their manifestations in emotions. Thus, for example, the virtue of benevolence is the “pattern,” but sympathy (*cè yīn* 惻隱) is a movement in the *qì* 氣, that is, an emotion or passion. Faithfulness, according to this strand of the Ruist tradition, is having a firm and unwavering commitment to the ethical pattern of the other four virtues. If one wavers in one’s commitment to benevolence, righteousness, and the other virtues, this is to be *unfaithful*, and it will reflect a disturbance (a motion) in one’s *qì*. However, if one is fully committed to benevolence, righteousness, wisdom, and propriety, then one is faithful, and the only motions in one’s *qì* will be the ones corresponding to these four virtues. So there is no emotion or passion that corresponds to *having* faithfulness. Cheng Yi ingeniously explains that this is why Mengzi does not mention faithfulness when he lists the four “other” cardinal virtues in *Mengzi* 2A6 and 6A6!<sup>90</sup>

I do not mean to suggest that there is no relationship at all between the School of the Way conception of faithfulness and the earlier conceptions of Kongzi and Mengzi. For Kongzi, failing to be faithful would lead me to lie and act deceptively (especially to my colleagues). For the School of the Way Ruists, to be unfaithful is to fail to be true to my real nature. This is also a kind of lying and deception (even though it is primarily *self*-deception). And it would, in all likelihood, lead to lying to others as well. The person who is not true to himself will break his word in order to satisfy the selfish desires that obscure his nature. However, I hope it

<sup>90</sup> Graham, *Two Chinese Philosophers*, pp. 54–55.

is also clear that neither Kongzi nor Mengzi shared anything like the metaphysical picture of *li* and *qi* that would allow them to understand faithfulness in quite the way that Cheng Yi and other later Ruists do.

Given the Ruist emphasis on familial obligations, it is not surprising that “filial piety” is an important virtue for them. And here, as with the other virtues, the appropriate motivation is crucial:

Nowadays “filial” means simply being able to provide one’s parents with nourishment. But even dogs and horses are provided with nourishment. If you are not reverent, wherein lies the difference? (2.7; cf. 2.8)

The Ruists see a close relationship between filial piety and ethical cultivation, so we shall return to it when we discuss cultivation in §II.D. For now, note that the Ruist emphasis on filial piety provides another point of contrast with the virtue ethics of Plato and Aristotle. Plato held that, in the ideal state, spouses and children would be held “in common” (at least among the class of “philosopher-kings”), and Aristotle regarded the family as merely a necessary *means* to facilitate true human flourishing (rather than a *constituent* of flourishing). Aquinas’s own views reflect the tensions within the Christian tradition, which includes both anti-familial elements (cf. Luke 14:26 and I Corinthians 7), as reflected in the celibate priesthood among Roman Catholics, but also a recognition of special obligations to one’s own relatives.

Returning to the *Analects*, we see that a couple of passages group three other virtues together in a pithy maxim that suggests they are somehow preeminent: “The wise are not confused, the humane are not anxious, and the courageous do not fear” (9.29; cf. 14.28, *The Mean* 20.8). In this passage is “humane” (*ren*) being used in a broad sense or a narrow sense? It seems hard to see how it could be used in a broad sense. If humaneness is the summation of virtue, it would subsume wisdom and courage. But then why not just say, “The one who possesses humaneness is free of confusion, worries, and fear”? So humaneness here is something more like loving others. Why are those who love others not anxious? Perhaps anxiety is something like the nervousness of the miser or the con man, always looking over his shoulder in fear of losing his fortune or having his bad deeds catch up with him.

Courage in the *Analects* is ethically informed: “To see what is right, but to fail to do it, is to be lacking in courage” (2.24). However, courage is not generally a virtue that Kongzi speaks highly of. Indeed, he seems to be at pains to dissuade his disciples (especially the headstrong Zilu) from overemphasizing it. He dryly remarks that “Zilu’s fondness for courage

exceeds mine" (5.7). (The uncharacteristic emphasis on courage in 9.29 and 14.28 might be taken as evidence that these passages are later interpolations, alien to the thought of Kongzi.)<sup>91</sup>

Wisdom (*zhī*) is similar in some ways to the "practical wisdom" (*phronêsis*) of the Aristotelian tradition. However, *zhī* is unlike practical wisdom in that the latter is a sort of master virtue that subsumes all the other virtues; in contrast, *zhī* seems to require humaneness for full virtue. In the *Analects* it has at least four parts: (1) the disposition to properly evaluate the characters of others and oneself; (2) skill at means-end deliberation: the ability to deliberate well about the best means to achieve given ends, and to determine the likely consequences of various courses of action; (3) an appreciation of and commitment to virtuous behavior; and (4) intellectual understanding, as of the *Odes*.

The *Analects* makes frequent reference to "understanding" (*zhī* 知) a person, in the sense of "appreciating" their abilities: "Do not be anxious about whether others appreciate (*zhī*) you; be anxious about whether you appreciate others" (1.16).<sup>92</sup> To "appreciate" someone in this sense is to recognize and properly evaluate her good and bad qualities. This aspect of wisdom is clearly important, for Kongzi is quite willing to judge the character of others. Indeed, Book 5 and part of Book 6 are devoted to such judgments. For example, 5.10 reports that Kongzi's disciple Zaiyu

was in the habit of sleeping during the daytime. The Master said, "Rotten wood cannot be carved, and a wall of dried dung cannot be beautified. As for Zaiyu, what would be the use of reprimanding him?"

Kongzi also judges himself, as when he says in 5.9 that he himself is "not the equal" of his own disciple Yan Hui, or in 5.28, where he remarks,

In any town of ten households you will be certain to find someone who is as devoted and trustworthy (*zhongxin*) as I am, but you will not find anyone who matches my love for learning.

We live in a society that frowns on making such judgments: we condemn as "judgmental" people who critique the character of others. (This is ironic, because in doing so we ourselves are making a judgment of character.)

<sup>91</sup> Mengzi gives a very nuanced account of courage in 2A2, but he does not list it as a cardinal virtue, so I do not discuss it in this book. But see my "Mencius on Courage" for an analysis of that passage.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. 1.1, 4.7, 4.14, 5.5, 5.8, 9.6, 12.22, 13.2, 14.30, 14.35, 15.14; cf. 2.11, 7.14, 9.28. I assume that the verbal use of *zhī* 知, "to know, to appreciate," is closely related to the nominal use, *zhī* 知 "wisdom." (In the *Analects*, the verbal and nominal uses are written with the same character. In later texts, the nominal use was generally written 智.)

However, in order to have an ethic of the virtues, it is crucial to be able to recognize the extent to which we and others live up to the ideal character.

Sometimes, wisdom (*zhi*) suggests a sort of intellectual understanding: Zigong comments, “When Hui hears one thing, he understands ten more things by means of it; when I hear one thing, I understand two more things by means of it” (5.9; cf. 3.11, 7.28, 9.8, 16.9). However, the person of *zhi* also has the practical knowledge that allows one to do such things as determine the best course of action, evaluate the likely consequences of a policy, and so forth. I take this to be part of the point behind saying that “those who are wise follow humaneness because they know that they will profit from it” (4.2). Furthermore, both “practical wisdom” and *zhi* involve an understanding of and commitment to virtue and virtuous behavior: “To dwell in humaneness is beautiful; if one chooses to not dwell in humaneness, how can one be wise?” (4.1; cf. 2.4, 3.22, 7.28). This part of wisdom might be described as a “meta-virtue,” a disposition to have an appropriate attitude toward and understanding of other virtues.

A number of passages pair humaneness and wisdom in a manner that suggests the two are equally important: “One who is wise takes joy in the rivers, while one who is humane takes joy in the mountains. The wise are active, while the humane are still. The wise are joyful, while the humane are long-lived” (6.23, cf. 4.1, 4.2, 6.22, 12.22). Given the great importance of humaneness, these pairings suggest that humaneness and wisdom together are Kongzi’s cardinal virtues.<sup>93</sup> How might humaneness and wisdom complement one another? Consider the following exchange:

Fan Chi asked about humaneness. The Master said, “Love others.” He then asked about wisdom. The Master said, “Understand (*zhī* 知) others.” Fan Chi did not yet understand. The Master said, “Raise the upright and set them over the crooked, and you will be able to make the crooked straight.”

[Fan Chi recounts the conversation to another disciple, Zixia.]

Zixia said, “Rich indeed is this teaching! When sage king Shun ruled the world, he raised up Gao Yao from the masses [to be Minister of Punishments], and those who were not humane kept their distance. When sage king Tang ruled the world, he raised up Yi Yin from the masses [to be his Prime Minister], and those who were not humane kept their distance.” (12.22)

<sup>93</sup> This intriguing possibility is opened up when we take off the blinders that are forced on us by reading the *Analects* in the light of either 4.15 or 13.3. (I’m not sure that these are really the cardinal virtues of Kongzi; I’m merely suggesting one intriguing conception of the virtues that the *Analects* offers us.)

Here, Kongzi suggests that an important aspect of humaneness is loving others, whereas an important aspect of wisdom is being able to understand and appreciate the character of others. Neither one of these explanations should surprise us. What is significant here is the suggestion about how the two interact. A good person in a position of authority will appoint and promote those who are “upright” so that government will function for the benefit of the people. Insofar as a person is humane, she will want government to function in this way. But humaneness is not the aspect of a person’s character that enables her to identify the right people. It is wisdom that allows one to properly understand and evaluate the character of others. If this interpretation is correct, then humaneness emphasizes the affective component of virtue, whereas wisdom emphasizes the practical, decision-making component of virtue.

Allow me to head off some possible misunderstandings of my suggestion. First, I am not asserting that there is any sharp or absolute distinction between cognition and emotion in early Chinese thought. I think that early Chinese thinkers recognized no such distinction (and I think they were right not to make any such cleavage). However, it is possible to recognize a *relative emphasis* on affect or cognition in different aspects of virtue. Second, what I have said does not assume that it is possible to be genuinely humane, yet lack wisdom, or genuinely wise, yet lack humaneness. It is possible, for all I have said, that Kongzi believed in a “unity of the virtues” regarding humaneness and wisdom. Perhaps humaneness and wisdom are related like the heart and lungs of the body. They are ontologically distinct, but neither can function without the other. Or perhaps the relationship is even more intimate. Perhaps humaneness and wisdom are like the concave and convex sides of a curve: conceptually distinguishable but ontologically inseparable. However, even if there is some type of unity of humaneness and wisdom, it might be possible to identify aspects of an essentially unified virtue.

Whether Kongzi had a list of cardinal virtues or not, it is clear that the major virtue terms in the *Analects* include at least humaneness, wisdom, devotion, and faithfulness. How does the possession of these particular virtues enable one to live what Ruists see as a flourishing life? It is perhaps easiest to see what is striking about these particular virtues by distinguishing them from what they are not. These virtues are practical as opposed to theoretical (i.e., they are unlike, say, Plato or Aristotle’s *epistêmê*), they are nontheological (unlike “faith, hope, and charity”), they are frequently exercised in agent-relative relationships with other people (unlike “benevolence” as it is conceived by consequentialists like the

Mohists or the Western utilitarians), and they are frequently exercised in hierarchical relationships. Indeed, one of the most striking differences between the Ruist virtues and the most common Western lists is the greater extent to which agent-relativity permeates the former.

### II.C. Philosophical Anthropology

Of the components of a virtue ethics, the *Analects* gives the most sketchy account of philosophical anthropology. The term for “[human] nature” occurs only twice in all of the *Analects*, and only one of those occurrences is in a saying attributed to Kongzi himself:

The natures of humans are similar to one another; they diverge as the result of practice. (17.2)

Taken by itself, this comment is painfully vague, being consistent with a wide variety of philosophical anthropologies (including the view that humans are, by nature, a tabula rasa on which experience writes). And notice, furthermore, that the passage occurs in one of the historically late books of the *Analects*. The only other occurrence of the term “nature” is in a quotation from Zigong:

The Master’s cultural brilliance is something that is readily heard about, whereas one does not get to hear the Master expounding upon the subjects of human nature, or the Way of Heaven. (5.13)

Generations of Chinese scholars who have believed that Kongzi clearly *did* have a well-worked-out view on human nature (and one that was essentially that of Mengzi, which they believed to be the same as that of Zhu Xi) have struggled to explain how he could have had a view that one of his closest disciples had never heard him expound. Suggestions include the possibility that Kongzi’s view of human nature was mystical and could not be put into words, or that Zigong himself had not heard the Master expound on this topic (because Kongzi deemed him unready) but that other disciples had. But perhaps the simplest explanation of 5.13 is that Kongzi did not have an explicit account of human nature.<sup>94</sup>

I suspect that part of the reason Kongzi does not have a detailed philosophical anthropology is that the need to supply such an account is felt acutely only when one is challenged by rival ethical views. This did not happen until the Mohists and especially Yang Zhu criticized Ruism.

<sup>94</sup> See Ivanhoe, “Whose Confucius? Which *Analects*?”

Nonetheless, I stand by my claim that a virtue ethic must have at least a vague, implicit account of human nature. The account suggested by most of the *Analects* is that human nature is inert and recalcitrant to ethical cultivation. For example, in 1.15, Zigong cites a couplet from the *Odes* that uses a simile taken from dressing jade: “As if cut, as if polished; / As if carved, as if ground.” The Master approves enthusiastically of this as an expression of the need for continual ethical cultivation. But if ethical cultivation is like working jade, then our original natures must be very resistant to it.<sup>95</sup> Such a view of human nature would explain Kongzi’s sad pronouncements on the rarity of virtue: “I should just give up! I have yet to meet the man who is able to perceive his own faults and then take himself to task inwardly” (5.27). These comments are also in line with Kongzi’s brief ethical autobiography in 2.4, in which he reports that it was only after fifty-five years of ethical cultivation that he “could follow [his] heart’s desire without overstepping the bounds of propriety.” And recall that Kongzi says turning toward ritual involves a process of “overcoming oneself” (12.1). Kongzi’s view thus seems fairly close to that of Xunzi, who held that our nature is resistant to virtue and must be reformed in order to become virtuous. This will seem quite objectionable to the generations of Ruists who, under the influence of the Cheng-Zhu and Lu-Wang schools, see Mengzi (who claimed that “human nature is good”) as the orthodox inheritor of the Ruist tradition. However, there seems little basis in the *Analects* for the Mengzian view that our nature has active, innate virtuous tendencies that provide the necessary resources for ethical cultivation.<sup>96</sup> Indeed, the jade metaphor seems just like the

<sup>95</sup> See Kupperman, *Learning from Asian Philosophy*, pp. 42–43, for thoughtful reflections on this brief but pregnant passage.

<sup>96</sup> Some passages might be used to argue that Kongzi saw human nature as providing some important basis that had to be combined with culture: “Ji Zicheng said, ‘Being a gentleman is simply a matter of substance (zhí 質). What is culture (wén 文) for?’ Zigong said, ‘... Culture is as [important as] substance; substance is as [important as] culture. The hide of a tiger or leopard is like the hide of a dog or sheep’” (12.8; cf. 6.18, 3.8). However, it is unclear what the word *zhi* means here (and in 6.18). Slingerland translates it “native substance,” which suggests that the *zhi* / culture distinction is roughly the nature/nurture distinction. However, the contrast might also be between two equally acquired aspects of character. To raise just one possibility, perhaps *zhi* is a matter of having acquired the right emotions and commitments, whereas culture is the refinement that allows one to express these emotions and commitments in appropriate ways. This interpretation makes more sense of Kongzi’s comment in 15.18 that “The gentleman makes righteousness his *zhi*, and puts it into effect by means of ritual.” (Kupperman also argues that Zigong’s comment in 12.8 does not endorse the existence of some original human nature [*Learning from Asian Philosophy*, p. 30].)

sort that Mengzi *rejects* in *Mengzi* 6A1. (When a rival philosopher says that making humans ethical is like carving cups and bowls out of wood, Mengzi objects that this will lead people to regard ethical cultivation as bad for them, since it destroys their nature.) On the other hand, the jade metaphor of 1.15 seems very similar to the ones Xunzi *endorses* in “An Exhortation to Learning” (where he compares ethical cultivation to steaming and bending straight wood into a circle, or grinding metal on a whetstone to sharpen it).<sup>97</sup>

## II.D. Ethical Cultivation

Almost all of the features of a flourishing Ruist life that we discussed earlier are also activities that have a function in ethical cultivation. Kongzi praises the effect of several aesthetic and educational factors when he advises, “Find inspiration in the *Odes*, take your place through ritual, and achieve perfection with music” (8.8). Kongzi’s disciple Youzi also makes an intriguing (although vague) suggestion about the importance of the family in ethical education: “Might we not say that filiality and respect for elders constitute the root of humaneness?” (1.2). The notion that respectful submission to one’s parents and elders is basic to ethical cultivation would not have surprised Freud. The superego is, after all, the psychological internalization of the monitoring function of the parents (and other authority figures). More broadly, recent psychological research on moral development has stressed the importance of the family in cultivating a virtuous person. It has been shown that parents who provide their children with affection, positive role modeling, clear boundaries for appropriate and inappropriate behavior, and encouragement of kind behavior are much more likely to produce caring children (who grow into caring adults) than those who do not.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>97</sup> On *Mengzi* 6A1, see Chapter 4, §VI.A.1. For Xunzi’s view, see *Xunzi* 1, “An Exhortation to Learning,” *Readings*, p. 256–57. Edward Slingerland explores in more detail the importantly different metaphors used by early Chinese thinkers in his *Effortless Action*, and some of his views are similar to my own: “Against Mencius’s internalist, naturalistic agricultural metaphors, Xunzi returns to Confucius’s *self-cultivation as craft formation* and *self-cultivation as long journey* schemas with a vengeance. In the *Xunzi*, as in the *Analects*, [effortless ethical action] is portrayed as the ‘destination’ at the end of a long, arduous trip, or as the respite or ‘ease’ (ān 安) enjoyed after a lifetime of bitter training and submission to external forms of behavior and thought” (pp. 17–18, emphasis in original).

<sup>98</sup> Staub, “Roots of Prosocial and Antisocial Behavior in Persons and Groups,” pp. 447–48. David Wong has also explored the ways in which Ruist views on the role of the family in ethical cultivation are in line with modern psychological theory (Wong, “Universalism



More generally, Ivanhoe (in his *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation*) explores two aspects of Ruist discussions of ethical cultivation over the last 2,500 years. First, there is a substantive tension within Ruism between two methods of self-cultivation. These methods are complementary, but it makes a significant difference which of the two a particular Ruist emphasizes. The tension is brought out by a memorable aphorism attributed to Kongzi:

If one learns without thinking, one will be confused. If one thinks without learning, one will be in danger. (2.15)

“Thinking” (sī 思), here, is not theoretical speculation, like the kind that Descartes did in his “stove-heated room” as he went through his “meditations.” As Arthur Waley explains, the term *si* has several senses, but

in each case we are dealing with a process that is only at a short remove from concrete observation. Never is there any suggestion of a long interior process of cogitation or ratiocination, in which a whole series of thoughts are evolved one out of the other, producing on the physical plane a headache and on the intellectual, an abstract theory. We must think of [*si*] rather as a fixing of the attention . . . on an impression recently imbibed from without and destined to be immediately re-exteriorized in action.<sup>99</sup>

Consequently, *si* is often more accurately translated as “concentration” or “attention.”

“Learning” (xué 學, sometimes rendered “study”) has both academic and nonacademic aspects. On the one hand, a gentleman learns the “six arts” (ritual, music, archery, calligraphy, charioteering, and mathematics) and the classic texts (ideally under the guidance of a wise teacher). But learning is also a matter of following role models. These may be found in historical, literary, or philosophical texts, but they may also be individuals of good character whom one knows in real life. In either case, the point of 2.15 is that one must not learn in a rote or passive way (else one will simply become “confused”) but must ruminate over what one has learned in order to understand and internalize it. On the other hand, the effort to concentrate without first imbibing good content to concentrate on will be “dangerous,” because it is unlikely that one innately has anything worth ruminating about.

vs. Love with Distinctions”). On Freud’s continuing relevance as a theorist of ethical cultivation, see Church, “Morality and the Internalized Other.”

<sup>99</sup>Waley, *Analects*, p. 45. For more on *si*, see Chapter 4, §IV.B.

Notice that this supports my interpretation of the implicit view of human nature in the *Analects*. For if human nature had active tendencies toward virtue, it would be less likely for *si* to be so “dangerous.” This leads us to Ivanhoe’s second major point: the relative emphasis on “learning” or “thinking” in a particular Ruist’s worldview is related to his conception of human nature. Indeed, one can trace out some of the major later debates within Ruism in terms of the relative emphasis on “learning” and “thinking,” and the underlying view of human nature.

Let’s review some of the later Ruists whom I introduced in Chapter 1, §I.B.3, focusing this time on how their conceptions of human nature interact with their views on the relative importance of thinking and learning. Mengzi held that human nature is good. Part of what he means by this claim is that humans have innate but incipient tendencies toward virtue. So the process of self-cultivation for Mengzi includes recognizing that we have these tendencies and focusing our attention on them: “the office of the heart is to concentrate. If it concentrates, then it will get [Virtue]. If it does not concentrate, then it will not get it” (6A15). The next major Ruist was Xunzi, who explicitly criticized Mengzi’s view, denying that humans have innate, incipient tendencies toward virtue. Rather, human nature is extremely recalcitrant to cultivation, and thus cultivation is more like bending wood or sharpening metal than tending a plant. Unsurprisingly, Xunzi strongly emphasizes learning from texts and teachers. He says, “I once spent the whole day pondering, but it wasn’t as good as a moment’s worth of learning.”<sup>100</sup>

The debate between the Lu-Wang and Cheng-Zhu schools can also be cast in terms of the “thinking”/“study” dichotomy in relation to conceptions of human nature. Zhu Xi held that human nature is originally so heavily obscured by selfish desires that it is dangerous to rely on one’s untutored ethical sense. Furthermore, Zhu Xi believed that, although *lǐ* 理 and *qì* 氣 are inseparable in fact, the two can be conceptually distinguished to a certain extent. Consequently, *study* of the classic texts provides expressions of the *lǐ* that can be understood, to a certain extent, out of their original contexts. These expressions can be used to clarify one’s understanding of the *lǐ* within oneself. In contrast, Wang Yangming was more radically monistic, arguing that any tendency to separate *lǐ* and

<sup>100</sup> Xunzi 1, “An Exhortation to Learning,” *Readings*, p. 257. This is a paraphrase of a saying attributed to Kongzi in *Analects* 15.31. Is Xunzi quoting Kongzi without attribution? Or is 15.31 a post-Xunzian interpolation in the *Analects*?

*qi*, or knowledge and action, introduced an ethically debilitating duality into one's life. He also worried that overattention to the study of classical texts would lead to pedantry and become a distraction from genuine ethical action. Wang argued that, since we already have a perfect nature within us (what he called *liáng zhī* 良知, "pure knowing"), all we have to do is to consult our true self and we will both know what to do and be motivated to act appropriately. Wang could thus be said to emphasize "thought" over "learning" (although he does not emphasize the term "concentration" [*si*], per se).

To the extent that Ruists *have* emphasized the study of texts, it has been important for them that these texts were regarded as classics. By this I do not necessarily mean that these texts were canonical. Canonical texts are works "declared to be authoritative" by some "political, ecclesiastical, or literary fiat."<sup>101</sup> Consequently, "canon" is defined in terms of institutional authority. "Classic," in contrast, is defined in terms of the attitude that a person or group chooses to take toward interpreting a text. The line between a classic and a canonical text can be hard to draw owing to fuzziness over what counts as a relevant institution. A university with its own "great books" curriculum has its own canon, in a sense. But I would argue that, for example, although Kongzi seems to have treated the *Odes* as a classic, it was not a canonical text in Kongzi's era, because there was then no *institution* (that we know of) that declared what constituted the Ruist canon.<sup>102</sup> And Zhu Xi, as we have seen, treated works like the *Mengzi* as classics, but it was not until the *Four Books* were officially declared the basis of the civil service examinations (an event that occurred after Zhu Xi's death) that they became canonical.

In some unjustly neglected work, John B. Henderson has shown that, despite the immense diversity in the texts they recognize as classics, commentarial traditions (including the Christian, Jewish, Islamic, Confucian, and Vedantic) show remarkable uniformity in the specific attitudes they take toward those texts.<sup>103</sup> Specifically, (1) the classics contain all of the most important learning and truth. A contemporary reader might see little in the *Odes* but the lyrics of quaint folk-songs and ancient courtly

<sup>101</sup> Henderson, *Scripture, Canon and Commentary*, p. 38.

<sup>102</sup> For a discussion of Kongzi's use of the *Odes*, see Ivanhoe, *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation*, pp. 3–4, and Goldin, "Reception of the *Odes* in the Warring States Era." For a very different view, see Van Zoeren, *Poetry and Personality*, pp. 25–51. (Van Zoeren is especially good in explaining the use of the odes in diplomatic situations.)

<sup>103</sup> Henderson, *Scripture, Canon and Commentary*, pp. 89–138.

music. But for Kongzi (as portrayed in the received text of the *Analects*) and later Ruists, the *Odes* are tools of both political action (13.5) and ethical cultivation (8.8), as well as sources of insight into everything from the deepest ethical issues (1.15, 3.8) to “the names for a wide variety of birds and beasts, plants and trees” (17.9).

(2) The classics are “well ordered and coherent.”<sup>104</sup> So, for example, Zhu Xi states that Book 1 of the *Analects*, precisely because it is the first book, is the “gateway to entering the Way” and records “ideas regarding focusing on what is fundamental.” In contrast, in discussing Book 20 (the very end of the *Analects*) he cites someone who observes that, if you really understand the topics addressed in the last chapter, “the activities of a gentleman are complete. Could it have been unintentional that the disciples recorded this to conclude this book?”<sup>105</sup>

(3) The classics are not contradictory, but are consistent. As we have seen, the ethical particularism of Ruism was manifested, in part, in “skillful means” of teaching (as evidenced by 11.22). This fact helped facilitate explaining away apparent contradictions.<sup>106</sup>

(4) The classics are ethically exemplary. They do not promote or endorse immorality. Indeed, one can become a better person through studying the classics. So, for example, Mengzi explains to his disciple Wan Zhang why sage Shun’s apparent violation of an ethical injunction stated in one of the *Odes* was actually justified. (I discuss this passage, 5A2, in detail in Chapter 4, §IV.B.2.)

(5) The classics are profound. This interpretive principle is founded on the assumption that there is a distinction between shallow and deep views of the world. In other words, there can be differences not only in the *quantity* of what one knows, but also in the *quality* of one’s perception of the world. (This is related to the ideal of the ethical connoisseur.) One consequence of this claim is that if, in reading a classic, we find parts banal or easily dismissed, our initial assumption should be that the problem is with us and not with the text.

(6) The classics contain nothing superfluous. Every “jot and tittle” of a classic is important. This encourages the interpreter to look for meaning in every nuance of a text, no matter how seemingly insignificant. Nivison points out a lovely example of this in Zhu Xi’s commentary on the

<sup>104</sup> Henderson, *Scripture, Canon and Commentary*, p. 106. That the ancient classics are orderly has recently been defended by Wang Bo, *Jianbo sixiang*, pp. 19–21.

<sup>105</sup> Zhu Xi, *Sishu jizhu*, commentary on *Analects*, Book 1, title, and commentary on 20:3 (respectively).

<sup>106</sup> Henderson, *Scripture, Canon and Commentary*, p. 169.

*Analects*. Recall that, in 15.24, Zigong asks Kongzi for a doctrine that can guide him throughout his life. In reply, Kongzi offers a characterization of reciprocity (shù 恕):

己所不欲勿施於人。

Do not impose upon others what you yourself do not desire.

In 5.12, Zigong proudly reports,

我不欲人之加諸我也，吾亦欲無加諸人。

What I do not desire others to do to me, I also desire not to do to others.

One would think that Zigong is simply doing what Kongzi told him to do. But Kongzi bursts Zigong's bubble, telling him that he "cannot come up to" the standard he claims to have met. One of the differences between these two passages is the use of wù 勿, "do not," in the first and wú 無, "not," in the second. Most of us today would assume that this is a minor syntactic difference necessitated by different contexts. In the former passage, Kongzi is *expressing* a prohibition; in the latter, Zigong is *asserting* his adherence to the prohibition. So in 5.12 Kongzi is simply telling Zigong that he has not yet succeeded in adhering to the prohibition. Or so it might seem. But according to a "pious exegete within the tradition" like Zhu Xi,<sup>107</sup> the syntactic difference points toward a further, deeper ethical distinction:

Master Cheng said, "... Sympathetic understanding is something that Zigong could perhaps force himself to do. But rén 仁 was 'not something he could come up to.'" In my own humble opinion, wú 無 is what is so naturally. Wù 勿 refers to forbidding. This is what makes the distinction between rén 仁 and sympathetic understanding.<sup>108</sup>

So Zhu Xi sees a subtle difference in wording between the two passages as reflecting two different stages in ethical cultivation: the stage Zigong is at (which involves forcing himself not to do some things to others that he is tempted to do) and the stage, which only a sage achieves, that Zigong *thinks* he is at (in which one has no desire to inflict on others what one would not like oneself).

<sup>107</sup> Nivison, "Golden Rule Arguments," p. 69.

<sup>108</sup> Zhu Xi, *Sishu jizhu*, commentary on 5.12.

III. ARGUMENTATION AND THE *ANALECTS*

It is a common view that the first rational argumentation in China is found, not in the *Analects*, but in the writings of the early Mohists.<sup>109</sup> Perhaps this accounts for Graham's dismissive comment that early Ruists "seemed incapable of debating any issue more momentous than 'Did Kuan Chung understand ceremony?'"<sup>110</sup> As we have seen, "ceremony" (lǐ 禮, "ritual") is a very complex and important topic, so Graham's superciliousness is unwarranted. Be that as it may, for Graham, the puzzle is to explain what he calls the "*peculiar* lasting power which enabled the Confucians to overcome their apparently stronger rivals."<sup>111</sup> Graham thinks the only explanation for Ruist success could be "their monopoly of traditional education."<sup>112</sup> "It may be suspected," Graham continues, "that if you wanted your son to have more than practical education you always had to send him to the [Ru], however much you might grumble that they were stuffing the lad's head with a lot of nonsense."<sup>113</sup> One gets the sense from Graham's tone that he agrees with the grumbling father in this case!

But perhaps the sense that the *Analects* presents little argumentation is created by an overly narrow conception of what argumentation is. Since the Enlightenment, it has been common to sharply distinguish adherence to a tradition from argument. However, Alasdair MacIntyre, among others, has called this dichotomy into question. He argues that

it is an illusion to suppose that there is some neutral standing ground, some locus for rationality as such, which can afford rational resources sufficient for enquiry independent of all traditions. Those who have maintained otherwise either have covertly been adopting the standpoint of a tradition and deceiving themselves and perhaps others... or else have simply been in error.<sup>114</sup>

At the risk of oversimplifying, MacIntyre's argument is that any form of enquiry must begin from some set of background assumptions, including assumptions about what the warranted forms of argument are. In addition, a human is neither (as the empiricists supposed) a *tabula rasa*

<sup>109</sup> See, for example, Graham, *Disputers*, p. 33.

<sup>110</sup> Graham, *Disputers*, p. 107.

<sup>111</sup> Graham, *Disputers*, p. 32. Emphasis mine. How were their rivals "stronger"? Presumably Graham means stronger in rational argumentation.

<sup>112</sup> Graham, *Disputers*, p. 32.

<sup>113</sup> Graham, *Disputers*, p. 33.

<sup>114</sup> MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* p. 367.

on which experience directly writes, nor (as rationalists supposed) a creature with unmediated access to rational truth. Consequently, we will (whether we like it or not, and whether we recognize it or not) get most of our background assumptions from some intellectual community. This does not prohibit individual innovation, or even wholesale intellectual revolution. But it does place constraints on how these can occur.

Intellectual communities are defined, in part, by their histories. And an intellectual community with an identity through time is a tradition. Thus, whether we are members of one of the (supposedly) antitraditional traditions that grew out of the Enlightenment, or one of the Thomist traditions, or some other – all enquiry is tradition-constituted. Seen in this light, the Ruist emphasis on tradition seems honest and realistic rather than dogmatic.

However, the fact that enquiry is tradition-constituted does not entail that all traditions are equally warranted. In order to explain why, MacIntyre identifies three stages a tradition goes through:

a first in which the relevant beliefs, texts, and authorities have not yet been put in question; a second in which inadequacies of various types have been identified, but not yet remedied; and a third in which response to those inadequacies has resulted in a set of reformulations, reevaluations, and new formulations and evaluations, designed to remedy inadequacies and overcome limitations.<sup>115</sup>

The first stage, that of innocence, cannot be recovered once it is lost. But the tradition will continue to go through the second and third stages as each new challenge to the tradition presents itself. The traditional will be successful, and adherence to it will be rationally warranted, as long as, and to the extent that, it continues to answer the challenges posed to it.

All that being said, we might still be struck by the ways in which the *Analects* seems different from some paradigmatic Western philosophical works that also emphasize tradition. For example, Catholic philosophy has long emphasized tradition, but Book II of Augustine's *Confessions* is a tightly argued work of philosophical psychology, and Aquinas's *Summa Theologiæ* bristles with specific arguments. Where are the analogous parts of the *Analects*? There are some, like Kongzi's justification for going along with a change in ritual in one case but not in another, and his rationalization of the three-year mourning period for parents (9.3 and 17.21, each discussed earlier in §II.A.1). But these are exceptions in a

<sup>115</sup> MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* p. 355.

text otherwise noteworthy for its lack of explicit arguments. There is, therefore, some force behind MacIntyre's complaint that in the *Analects* "the insights of the wise . . . are generally not represented as, nor justified as, conclusions of arguments." Rather, "the terminus of justification is generally the simple assertion of some particular value."<sup>116</sup>

Kupperman has some comments that are relevant here. He observes that, when considering reasons for accepting (or rejecting) a philosophical position, it "is tempting to hold up reasons that refer to deductive implications, or conversely to inconsistencies that can be demonstrated deductively, as paradigmatic."<sup>117</sup> However, it can be a serious consideration in favor of a philosophical worldview that, as a whole, it simply seems "to make sense of the world and of everyday experience in ways that other positions cannot match."<sup>118</sup> In other words, the argument in favor of a philosophy may simply be that it, as a whole, gives us the best available "orientation that is fruitful in making sense of the world."<sup>119</sup> To what extent did Kongzi's worldview do this?

Kongzi was born into a culture well in the second stage of a developing tradition that MacIntyre describes. The collapse of the authority of the Zhou Dynasty suggested that there was a fundamental inadequacy to the tradition. The traditional social structure no doubt was starting to seem irrelevant. *Pari passu*, the ideal traits of a "gentleman" were also coming to seem anachronistic. Thus, practitioners of realpolitik could ask derisively, "Of what use is culture?" (12.8). (One is reminded of Goebel's chilling comment, "When someone mentions 'culture,' I reach for my pistol.")

The four questions that a thoughtful person in Kongzi's era would have seen as most pressing were these: what is the cause of the warfare, murder, suffering, and chaos that currently plagues our world? What alternative social structure should we aim for to end this situation? How can we achieve this structure? What role do I play in all this? Kongzi's greatest

<sup>116</sup> MacIntyre, "Once More on Confucian and Aristotelian Conceptions of Virtues," pp. 160, 161. MacIntyre is making a general claim about Ruism. As Chapter 4 will show, his observations are much more accurate about the *Analects* than about later Ruist texts like the *Mengzi*.

<sup>117</sup> Kupperman, *Learning from Asian Philosophy*, p. 10.

<sup>118</sup> Kupperman, *Learning from Asian Philosophy*, p. 9.

<sup>119</sup> Kupperman, *Learning from Asian Philosophy*, p. 11. It is worth noting that two of the best-known forms of argumentation in contemporary analytic philosophy, inference to the best explanation and reflective equilibrium, are neither of them purely deductive in form.



contribution may have been to begin a revival of tradition that attempted to show its contemporary relevance by answering these questions: society has fallen away from the Way, the practices of the ancient sages; we should aim to revive their ideal society; we do so by getting virtuous individuals into positions of political authority; your role is to strive to be virtuous, to work for social reform when you obtain office, to refuse to participate in viciousness no matter what the temptation, and to take pleasure in the goods of beauty, study, ritual, and friendship whether in office or not. Thus, Kongzi revitalized his tradition in a way that gave it renewed social and personal relevance. As far as we can tell (and the sources are, admittedly, fragmentary), Kongzi was the only person in his era who offered a coherent, detailed, social, and personal worldview. It thereby provided what was, at the time, probably by far the best available "orientation" for "making sense of the world." Thus, in a sense, the whole text of the *Analects* is its own argument.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Some texts are interesting for what they say; some texts are interesting for what they inspire others to say. We might call the former "systematic texts" and the latter "evocative texts." The *Analects* is of the second kind. The difference is only a matter of degree. Every text requires interpretation, an interpretation is what a text has inspired someone to say, and no interpretation is final and definitive (if only because an interpretation is itself just another text). Furthermore, it is ironic but indubitable that some of the interpretations that teach us the most about ourselves and the world are by those who are reading evocative texts but believe that they are discovering the unique meaning of a systematic text (like Zhu Xi interpreting the *Analects*, or Aquinas interpreting the New Testament).

Nonetheless, if we use some particular methodology (an analytic philosophical one, a literary structuralist one, a Foucaultian hermeneutic of suspicion, or some other) and apply it carefully to a systematic text, the range of plausible interpretations narrows. We are like a traveler going from the forbidding vastness of a pathless wilderness and finding the way to a comfortable village, which we happily make our home. But when we read an evocative text, the greatest care in reading just opens up more interpretive possibilities and raises more questions. In this case, we are like explorers who escape narrow confines, joyful at the broad vistas

we discover, but knowing that the paths we walk diverge, that every cross-road leads to others further on, and that we can never explore them all.

But not every journey is worth taking. Virtue ethics has been criticized from a variety of perspectives in the West, including consequentialism. Similarly, in ancient China, Mozi offered a consequentialist alternative to Ruism. We turn now to his views.

## Mozi and Early Mohism

When one advances claims, one must first establish a standard of assessment. To make claims in the absence of such a standard is like trying to establish on the surface of a spinning potter's wheel where the sun will rise and set. Without a fixed standard, one cannot clearly ascertain what is right and wrong or what is beneficial and harmful.

– Mozi

If utility is the ultimate source of moral obligations, utility may be invoked to decide between them when their demands are incompatible. . . . in other systems, the moral laws all claiming independent authority, there is no common umpire entitled to interfere between them; their claims to precedence one over another rest on little better than sophistry, and, unless determined, as they generally are, by the unacknowledged influence of considerations of utility, afford a free scope for the action of personal desires and partialities.

– John Stuart Mill

Mozi was the first person we know of in Chinese history who presented a detailed, coherent worldview that was critical of, and gave a systematic alternative to, Ruism. In place of Kongzi's cultivated ethical connoisseur, whose intuitive responsiveness cannot be captured by general rules, Mozi offers us a general algorithm for determining what is right: aim at maximizing benefits impartially.

In this chapter I shall discuss the views of early Mohism. By “early Mohism” I mean the views expressed by the “synoptic chapters” of the *Mozi*. (This phrase is explained in the next section.) I believe that the synoptic chapters present a position that was much like that of Mozi the historical individual. I also believe that the synoptic chapters reflect what the views of Mohists were like prior to the “language crisis” of the fourth century B.C.E., because we do not find significant indications of this crisis

in them. (See Chapter 2, §I.B.2 on the “language crisis.”) I shall use the phrase “Neo-Mohism” to refer to the views expressed in the “dialectical chapters,” which clearly are a response to the language crisis. However, what is most important for my purposes is that the synoptic chapters represent a detailed and largely coherent philosophical position, regardless of when they were composed, or how they relate to the views of the historical Mozi.

## I. TEXTUAL ISSUES

The writings today bound together under the title “Mozi” are an exceedingly diverse group. Their diversity in topics is evident from a random sampling of chapter headings: “Impartial Caring,” “For Moderation in Funerals,” “On Ghosts,” “A Condemnation of the Ru,” “Names and Objects,” “Defense against Attack from an Elevation,” “Defense against Attack with Ladders.” The chapters are also stylistically diverse. The Mohists arguably wrote the first essays, per se, in Chinese literature. But their writings also include dialogues and what might be described as catechisms. Not surprisingly, the various chapters of the *Mozì* seem to originate from different historical periods, sometime in between the life of Mozi himself (fifth century B.C.E.) and the beginning of the Han Dynasty (202 B.C.E.), when the school suddenly died out.

We can divide the chapters into five groups.<sup>1</sup> The “synoptic chapters” (chapters 8–39) are ten sets of three chapters and one set of two chapters, each set with the same title and on the same general topic.<sup>2</sup> The topics of these chapters apparently cover the major theses of the early Mohist movement. The “dialectical chapters” (40–45) form a fascinating set of documents. They include discussions of informal logic, the philosophy of language, mathematics, mechanics, and optics. They date from after (and are in part a response to) the “language crisis” of the late fourth

<sup>1</sup> Wu, *Mozi jiaozhu*, and Sun, *Mozi jiangsu*, are two standard Chinese versions of the text with commentary. There is currently no complete English translation of the *Mozi*, but Ian Johnston is at work on one.

<sup>2</sup> An anecdote recorded in *Mozi* 49 (Mei, *Motse*, p. 251) suggests that the synoptic chapters cover the main theses of Mozi. (But, of course, the anecdote may have been invented to justify the list of topics covered in these chapters.) We have lost some members of some sets, but most survive. And there apparently were only ever two versions of “A Condemnation of the Ru.” *Readings* includes translations of selected portions of the synoptic chapters. More extensive selections may be found in Watson, *Mo Tzu*. A complete translation may be found in Mei, *Motse*.

century B.C.E.<sup>3</sup> The “Mohist analects” (46–50) is a collection of dialogues and brief stories involving Mozi. The narrative complexity of these chapters leads me to believe that they date from the fourth century B.C.E. or later. The “military chapters” (52–71) are guides for how to *defend* against various types of attack. Finally, there is a set of miscellaneous essays and dialogues (1–7) on various topics.<sup>4</sup>

No chapter purports to be an essay by Mozi himself. Indeed, many chapters cite “Zǐ Mòzǐ 子墨子, our Master Mozi,” which makes clear that they were written by his followers. There are frequent quotations attributed to Mozi, but (owing in part to the lack of quotation marks in Classical Chinese) it is typically not clear where the quotations end, so we cannot be sure how much the chapter explicitly attributes to Mozi himself. Mozi founded an organized social and intellectual movement, but it apparently split into three sects at some time after his death. Since the synoptic chapters are grouped into sets of three, it is a natural assumption that each version represents the views of one of the three sects. This interpretation has been defended and developed by A. C. Graham, who thought that we can identify the “purist,” “compromising,” and “reactionary” wings of the Mohist movement: “Evidently the issue over which the sects fought was the perennial one of doctrinal purity or accommodation to political realities.” Graham’s interpretation is disputed, though, by Scott Lowe, among others.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The dialectical chapters suffered immense textual corruption at the hands of generations of scribes who miscopied them because they did not understand what they were reading. Graham, *Later Mohist Logic*, is an authoritative (but weighty) English-language study of these chapters. For a less intimidating survey, see Graham, *Disputers*, pp. 137–70. But see also Geaney, “Critique of A.C. Graham’s Reconstruction of the ‘Neo-Mohist Canons,’” and Johnston, “Choosing the Greater and Choosing the Lesser.”

<sup>4</sup> Mei, *Motse*, gives a complete translation of the “Mohist analects” and the miscellaneous chapters. One set of synoptic chapters is entitled “A Condemnation of Aggressive War”; the Mohists apparently believed that it would help prevent offensive warfare if defensive techniques were well developed and well known. The leading expert on the Mohist military chapters is Robin D. S. Yates (see Yates, “Early Poliorcetics,” idem, “Reconstruction of the Tactical Chapters,” and idem, “Mohists on Warfare”). In one of these chapters (*Mozi* 62, “Defense against Tunneling”) the Mohists write of using a large drum, placed in an underground tunnel, to detect the sounds of enemy miners digging to undermine a defensive wall. The drum would resonate with and amplify the sounds of the miners’ tunnelling, which could then be detected by a guard. In 2005, the television show *Mythbusters* recreated the Mohist technique, and verified that it works. Indeed, it seemed to work as well as or better than contemporary microphones (*Mythbusters*, “Chinese Invasion Alarm”).

<sup>5</sup> Graham, *Disputers*, p. 51. The division in later Mohism is noted in *Han Feizi* 50, “On the Prominent Schools of Thought,” *Readings*, pp. 351–52. For the argument over the

My own view is that, whatever their origin, the differences in actual philosophical content among the synoptic chapters are typically quite small. For example, Graham notes that, of the three versions of “Honoring the Worthy,”

the Compromiser does not mention promotion of peasants, craftsmen, and traders, and is not explicit that appointment is to depend solely on merit; the Reactionary dilutes the doctrine to the demand that those appointed be “not *necessarily* blood relations of kings, dukes and great men, enriched and ennobled without reason, or handsome of face.”<sup>6</sup>

However, these differences from what Graham identifies as the “Purist” version of the same chapter may merely represent different degrees of elaboration and clarification of the same doctrine. Does the “Compromiser” *disagree* that peasants, craftsmen, and traders may be appointed to high office if they are worthy, or does he merely neglect to state it explicitly? This seems unlikely, since all three versions of this chapter cite the same examples of individuals who were promoted from humble positions to high office because of their merit.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, small differences in phrasing among the chapters are to be expected if, as Graham himself suggests, the versions “were written down from a common oral tradition.”<sup>8</sup>

Overall, I find that the synoptic chapters present a consistent and coherent worldview. Consequently, I think we have a much more unified picture of early Mohism than we do of Kongzi’s thought. I shall try to sketch that Mohist view now.

## II. MOHIST CONSEQUENTIALISM

### II.A. Why Consequentialism?

Often, in a philosophical system, there are a few core commitments or beliefs that attract adherents to the system. Other aspects of the system may largely be consequences, elaborations, or defenses of that core. We sometimes understand a philosophy better if we can grasp what these root commitments are. I think that the root of the early Mohist philosophy

relationship between the synoptic chapters and the three sects of later Mohism, see Graham, *Divisions in Early Mohism Reflected in the Core Chapters of the Mo-tzu*, and Lowe, *Mo Tzu’s Religious Blueprint for a Chinese Utopia*.

<sup>6</sup> Graham, *Disputers*, p. 51. Emphasis in original.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Mei, *Motse*, pp. 33–34, 43–44, 53.

<sup>8</sup> Graham, *Disputers*, p. 35. I shall provide further examples in my notes of variations among the synoptic chapters and explain why I generally find them insignificant.

may be found in these two brief quotations (both attributed explicitly to Mozi himself):

When one advances claims, one must first establish a standard of assessment [yí 儀]. To make claims [yán 言] in the absence of such a standard is like trying to establish on the surface of a spinning potter's wheel where the sun will rise and set. Without a fixed standard, one cannot clearly [míng 明] ascertain what is right and wrong or what is beneficial and harmful.<sup>9</sup>

I hold to the will of Heaven as a wheelwright holds to his compass and a carpenter his square. Wheelwrights and carpenters hold fast to their compasses and squares in order to gauge what is round and square throughout the world saying, "What is plumb with this is correct, what is not is incorrect!" The books of all the gentlemen in the world today are so numerous that they cannot be exhaustively catalogued and their teachings and maxims [yán yǔ 言語] are more than can be counted. . . . But they are far from what is benevolent and right! How do I know this? I say, "I measure them with the clearest standard [míng fǎ 明法] in all the world."<sup>10</sup>

These comments can be seen as, in part, a reaction against the Ruist notion of "ethical connoisseurs" (Chapter 1, §II.B.3.b).

As we have seen, Ruism may be treated as a type of virtue ethics. Virtue ethics does not entail that there are ethical connoisseurs. One can have a moderate form of virtue ethics, in which it serves as a supplement to a consequentialist or rule-deontological view. Typically, for these positions, ethical perception and judgment do not require connoisseurship. However, the more radical a virtue ethics is, the more it will emphasize ethical connoisseurs. The Ruism of Kongzi tends toward a more radical form of virtue ethics, so it encourages us to become ethical connoisseurs. Part of being an ethical connoisseur is developing a sort of insight that resists formulation in clear, explicit rules. This is intrinsically elitist. Whether it is necessarily a bad sort of elitism is an open question. However, we can see why someone might be tempted to reject Ruism as a sort of elitist obscurantism. So it is not surprising that, in the first quotation above, we see the Mohists' commitment to finding a clear [míng 明] standard of assessment.<sup>11</sup> When Ruists said things like, "Acting in the world, the

<sup>9</sup> Mozi 35, "A Condemnation of Fatalism," *Readings*, p. 111. HY 56/35/6–7.

<sup>10</sup> Mozi 26, "Heaven's Will," *Readings*, p. 94. (Ivanhoe has "true" and "false" for shì 是 and fēi 非. I have changed this to "correct" and "incorrect.") HY 41/26/41–42/26/44.

<sup>11</sup> Of the three versions of "A Condemnation of Fatalism," we find 儀, "standard," in 35 and 37, but 儀法 in 36. In addition, the three "gauges" (see later in this chapter) are referred to as 表 in 35, but as 法 in 36 and 37. Of the three versions of "Heaven's Will," we find 法 in 26, but in 27 we find, "Hence, I set this [i.e., Heaven's intent] as 法; I establish this as 儀" (HY 45/27/71), and in 28 we find 儀法, 法, and 經 used interchangeably.

gentleman has no predispositions for or against anything. He merely seeks to be on the side of what is righteous" (*Analects* 4.10), the Mohists saw a standard that gave no real guidance because it shifted like "a spinning potter's wheel" with every situation *and* with every Ruist!

But a clear standard may take many forms. The Mohists were drawn to a standard that is impartial (jiān 兼) rather than partial (bié 別). The Mohists wanted a standard that was not based on the intentions (zhì 志) or benefits (lì 利) of a particular person, clan, or state. This standard was supplied by an appeal to Heaven (tiān 天). Heaven, in the Chinese worldview, does not have a "chosen people."<sup>12</sup> Consequently, it provides the ultimately impartial perspective: Heaven "sheds light upon all impartially" and "lays claim to all impartially."<sup>13</sup> And the Mohists held that, if we to follow the intention (or "will") of Heaven, we will follow the "doctrines" [yán 言] that have the consequence of impartially benefitting "all under Heaven" (tiān xià 天下). So, in terms of Western categories, the Mohists were consequentialists.

The Mohists' consequentialism does not logically follow simply from the fact that they take an impartial perspective. However, once one has taken such a perspective, consequentialism does seem like one of the most plausible positions.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, keep in mind that the Mohists wanted a clear (míng 明) standard of evaluation. Judging things in terms of their consequences is a clear standard that is widely accepted. Indeed, all sane humans (regardless of culture) engage in such judgments at least some of the time. As the Mohists observe, we can sensibly ask, "What is the purpose of clothes?" and the answer will be, "It is to protect us from the cold of winter and the heat of summer." If we ask, "What is the purpose of houses?" the answer will be, "It is to protect us from the wind and cold of winter, the heat and rain of summer, and to keep out robbers and thieves."<sup>15</sup> In each case, our question and our answer suppose that we use things for the benefits to be achieved. Why not, the Mohists are

There seems to be no significant difference in meaning in these cases. This illustrates that the differences among the synoptic chapters are matters of phrasing or degree of elaboration, rather than fundamental doctrinal disagreements.

<sup>12</sup> Heaven does confer a mandate to rule on a particular dynasty, but this is contingent on the Virtue of the sovereigns. In contrast, the Israelites were Yahweh's chosen people even when they misbehaved. (Admittedly, He does consider destroying them more than once because they are so "stiff-necked" in failing to obey Him, but He always relents.)

<sup>13</sup> *Mozi* 26, "Heaven's Will," *Readings*, p. 93.

<sup>14</sup> I think Thomas Nagel has done an excellent job of diagnosing the connection between taking "a maximally detached standpoint" and consequentialism. See his *View from Nowhere*, especially p. 8 and pp. 162–63.

<sup>15</sup> *Mozi* 20, "For Moderation in Expenditures," *Readings*, p. 78.



suggesting, judge everything (and in particular competing doctrines) in terms of their benefits?

The imperative to benefit all under Heaven is contentless unless we have some conception of what the “benefits” are. As we saw, the father of Western utilitarianism, Jeremy Bentham, advocated maximizing the total of pleasure across all people, where pleasure was defined in terms of subjective satisfaction. Similarly, Neo-Mohism suggests a psychological characterization of benefit: “Benefit (lì 利): what one is pleased to get.” “Harm (hài 害): what one dislikes to get.”<sup>16</sup> However, early Mohism identifies benefit (lì 利) with having particular concrete goods, and harm (hài 害) with lacking these goods: wealth (fù 富), populousness (zhòng 眾), and good order (zhì 治):

If the world is poor, benevolent people do what they can to enrich it. If the people are few, benevolent people do what they can to increase their numbers. If the world is in chaos, benevolent people do what they can to make it well ordered.<sup>17</sup>

## II.B. Mohism and “Divine Command Theory”

The Mohists appeal to impartiality, and they appeal to the perspective of Heaven, which they typically treat anthropomorphically. They assume that these two standards always point to the same answer, but a natural question to ask is which the Mohists would favor if the two diverged. In other words, do the Mohists follow the will of Heaven because it is impartial, or are the Mohists impartial because it is the will of Heaven? According to a position known in the West as “Divine Command Theory,” what makes an action right is that God *decrees* that it is right.<sup>18</sup> In the West, this possibility is first raised in Plato’s *Euthyphro*, where Socrates asks whether the gods love something because it is pious, or whether it is pious *because* the gods love it. If this seems obscure, consider an analogy. Is a street a one-way road because the government decrees that it is, or does the government decree that it is a one-way road because it is (independently) a one-way road? Here the answer seems obvious: what makes a road one-way is precisely the fact that the government decrees that it is. There is no independent metaphysical fact about a

<sup>16</sup> Mohist “Canons,” definition A26 and A27. Cf. Graham, *Later Mohist Logic*, p. 282, Graham, *Disputers*, p. 145.

<sup>17</sup> Mozi 25, “For Moderation in Funerals,” *Readings*, p. 80. This list of three goods is repeated in several other places. See *Mozi*, Chapter 8 (*Readings*, p. 61), Chapter 26 (*Readings*, p. 91), and Chapter 35 (*Readings*, p. 110).

<sup>18</sup> See Frankena, *Ethics*, pp. 28–30, and Quinn, “Divine Command Theory.”

road that makes it one-way. But what about the following case? Does  $E = mc^2$  simply because Einstein said so, or did Einstein say that  $E = mc^2$  because it is true (independently) that  $E = mc^2$ ? Here, it seems that the fact is independent of what Einstein (or anyone else) says. Now, Plato has Socrates argue that the gods approve of something because it is good, so that the Good is independent of the gods' approval. However, some theists, notably William of Ockham, have defended a Divine Command Theory (D.C.T.), according to which what makes something good is merely the fact that God commands it. Analogously, we might ask whether the Mohists regard impartial benevolence as right simply because Heaven decrees that it is right, or whether Heaven decrees that impartial benevolence is right because it *is* right (independently of the decree of Heaven).

One disturbing consequence of D.C.T. is that, theoretically, God could decree that "Slaughter the innocents" is morally mandated, and it *would* then be the right thing to do, just because God said it was. (Indeed, reading the book of Joshua from the Bible might give one the impression that God *did* decree that.) Do the Mohists hold something similar about Heaven? If Heaven decreed, "Benefit people impartially – except for the Miao, whom you should slaughter indiscriminately," would the Mohists have to acknowledge that this had become the right action?

There has been a spirited and fruitful debate on this topic since Dennis Ahern first raised the issue. Ahern pointed out that there are passages in the *Mozi* that seem to advocate something like D.C.T., but there are also passages that seem to regard impartial benevolence as the fundamental standard of rightness. Ahern concludes that the Mohist statements on this topic are indeterminate. The Mohists thought that the will of Heaven always, in fact, coincides with impartial benevolence, so the question of which was more fundamental never occurred to them and was not clearly addressed in their writings. Among later interpreters, Rodney Taylor and David Soles have defended the interpretation of Mohists as advocates of D.C.T., whereas Dirck Vorenkamp and Kristopher Duda have argued against such a reading.<sup>19</sup>

Perhaps the strongest passage in favor of a D.C.T. interpretation is – according to the translation by Burton Watson – the following:

Righteousness is what is right. Subordinates do not decide what is right for their superiors; it is the superiors who decide what is right for their

<sup>19</sup>Ahern, "Is Mo Tzu a Utilitarian?" Taylor, "Religion and Utilitarianism," Soles, "Mo Tzu and the Foundations of Morality," Vorenkamp, "Another Look at Utilitarianism in Mo-tzu's Thought," and Duda, "Reconsidering Mo Tzu on the Foundations of Morality."

subordinates. Therefore the common people devote their strength to carrying out their tasks, but they cannot decide for themselves what is right. There are gentlemen to do that for them. . . . The three high ministers and the feudal lords devote their strength to managing the affairs of government, but they cannot decide for themselves what is right. There is the Son of Heaven to do that for them. But the Son of Heaven cannot decide for himself what is right. There is Heaven to decide that for him. The gentlemen of the world have no difficulty in perceiving that the Son of Heaven decides what is right for the three high ministers, the feudal lords, the gentlemen, and the common people. But the people of the world are unable to perceive that Heaven decides what is right for the Son of Heaven.<sup>20</sup>

Soles cites this translation as evidence for a D.C.T. interpretation of the Mohists, but Duda argues that the passage does not require such a reading because of the ambiguity of the word “decide.” Does Heaven *decide* what is right like I might *decide* what to have for dinner (i.e., in an arbitrary matter of free choice)? Or does Heaven *decide* what is right like a mathematician might *decide* what the volume of a sphere is (i.e., determine what the objective answer is as a matter of independent fact)? Only in the former sense of “decide” have the Mohists committed themselves to D.C.T.<sup>21</sup>

Soles and Duda are both limited, though, by the fact that they are working with a translation. When we consult the original Chinese text, we find that things are much murkier. First, there is no reference in the Chinese text to deciding. (There are convenient ways in Chinese to express the notion, such as *zé* 擇, but they are not used.) More complexity becomes apparent if one compares Watson’s translation with my own:

To be righteous is to govern (*zhèng* 政). Subordinates do not govern superiors; superiors must govern subordinates. Therefore, the common people exhaust their effort in their tasks, but may not govern however they wish. There are nobles to govern them. . . . The Son of Heaven may not govern however he wishes. There is Heaven to govern him. That the Son of Heaven governs the three dukes, the assorted lords, the nobles and the common people is something that the nobles and gentlemen of the world clearly understand. But that Heaven governs the Son of Heaven the people of the world do not clearly understand.<sup>22</sup>

So whereas Watson has (for example), “but the people of the world are unable to perceive that Heaven decides what is right for the Son of Heaven,” I would translate, “but that Heaven governs the Son of Heaven the people of the world do not clearly understand.” Why the difference?

<sup>20</sup> Watson, *Mo Tzu*, pp. 79–80, citing *Mozi* 26.

<sup>21</sup> Soles, “Mo Tzu and the Foundations of Morality,” pp. 39–40, and Duda, “Reconsidering Mo Tzu on the Foundations of Morality,” p. 25.

<sup>22</sup> *Mozi* 26, “The Will of Heaven.” Cf. Mei, *Motse*, pp. 136–37, and *Readings*, p. 91.

Watson has amended zhèng 政, “to govern,” to zhèng 正, “standard,” following the commentary of Sun Yirang (*Mozi jiangū*). There is some warrant for this. The characters are homophones, and in the Chapter 28 version of the same passage, we find 正 used consistently instead of 政. But which version comes closer to expressing the Mohists’ views? Let’s compare the versions of this passage found in each of the three synoptic chapters, “The Will of Heaven.” The above passage comes from the Chapter 26 version. The Chapter 28 version is closely parallel, but the passage begins as follows:

Heaven desires what is righteous and hates what is not righteous. How do we know that this is so? I say that righteousness is what is correct (yì zhě zhèng yě 義者正也). How do we know that righteousness is what is correct? When there is righteousness in the world, it is orderly; when there is no righteousness in the world, then it is chaotic. By this we know that righteousness is what is correct. Furthermore, correction is not given by a subordinate to a superior; superiors must correct their subordinates. Therefore, the common people. . . .<sup>23</sup>

The Chapter 27 version is quite different:

How do we know that righteousness does not come from the ignorant and base, but must come from the noble and the wise? I say that righteousness is governing well (shàn zhèng 善政). How do we know that righteousness is governing well? I say that when there is righteousness in the world then it is orderly, and when there is no righteousness in the world then it is chaotic. Hence, we know that righteousness is governing well. Now, the ignorant and the base do not govern over the noble and the wise. One is noble and wise and only then does one govern over the ignorant and the base. This is how we know that righteousness does not come from the ignorant and the base, but must come from the noble and the wise. But who is noble? And who is wise? I say that it is simply Heaven that is noble and wise. Thus righteousness does in fact come from Heaven.<sup>24</sup>

If we look at these three passages together, we see that the early Mohists were discussing the will of Heaven in close connection with issues of “governing well” and “correcting” subordinates. They argued that producing “order” and avoiding “chaos” requires a hierarchy in which the “noble and wise” are at the top, culminating in Heaven itself. The argument seems to be more about properly understanding the hierarchical structure of society and the cosmos rather than about the ultimate foundation of righteousness. (As we shall see in §IV.B and §IV.C, the notion that hierarchy is justified because it is the antidote to chaos is

<sup>23</sup> *Mozi* 28. Cf. Mei, *Motse*, pp. 151–52.

<sup>24</sup> *Mozi* 27. Cf. Mei, *Motse*, p. 141.

central to Mohist political philosophy.) And recognition of hierarchy, including the superiority of Heaven over the Son of Heaven, does not in itself require D.C.T. For example, even though Socrates argues against D.C.T., he also recognizes that the gods are superior to humans, and he advocates piety toward them.<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, three points speak strongly against a D.C.T. interpretation of early Mohism. First, there are a number of passages in which the early Mohists emphasize the importance of their impartial consequentialist standard without making any reference to it being grounded in the intentions of Heaven. Second, as Vorenkamp points out, the Neo-Mohists seem to have dropped any reference to the notion of Heaven. It seems unlikely that they would have done so if the will of Heaven were in fact one of the foundational features of Mohist ethics.<sup>26</sup> Third, the metaphysical assumptions that lead Western thinkers like Ockham to accept D.C.T. are simply not shared by early Chinese thinkers.

What motivates philosophers like Ockham are the beliefs that God radically transcends the world, and that the world is completely dependent on God for its creation and continued existence. Philosophers who hold a Divine Command view think that, if someone were to say that God decrees what is right because it *is* right, that would suggest that there is something independent of God that limits God's power. But the Mohists do not hold that there is a yawning metaphysical chasm between Heaven and humans. It is a commonplace to observe that, for Chinese thinkers throughout history, Heaven, Earth, and humans form a trinity of closely interrelated entities. Heaven is undeniably "higher" than humans in some sense. But I cannot imagine that the Mohists regard Heaven as transcending Earth and humans to such a degree that it would be *lese majesty* to suggest that Heaven does not simply decide, by an ultimately arbitrary act of will, what is benevolent and righteous. Consequently, there is nothing problematic for them in saying that Heaven favors what is righteous because it is righteous.

## II.C. Rules and Consequences

There are several points on which the Mohist position seems even more indeterminate. Recall the distinction between act-consequentialism and

<sup>25</sup> See the *Apology* and the death scene at the end of the *Phaedo* on Socratic piety. See the *Euthyphro* on Socrates' rejection of D.C.T. Again, this is all subject to the qualification that it is difficult to disentangle the historic Socrates from Plato's presentation of him.

<sup>26</sup> Vorenkamp, "Another Look at Utilitarianism in Mo-tzu's Thought," pp. 438–39.

rule-consequentialism (Chapter 1, §II.A). *What* is it that the Mohists are evaluating using their consequentialistic criterion? Are they evaluating individual actions or rules? To see why this is an important distinction, suppose it turns out that a general policy of acting in accordance with Ruist graded love would maximize benefits in most cases (because I might generally be better situated to care for my own friends and family members than for strangers), but that violating that policy would maximize impartial benefit in a few particular situations. If the Mohists are rule-consequentialists, they would have to say that we should always act in accordance with Ruist graded love (but should do so for a consequentialist, not Ruist, justification). In contrast, if they are act-consequentialists, they would say that we should normally act in accordance with graded love but must violate it when it would produce better impartial consequences to do so.

Christian Jochim and Dirck Vorenkamp both state that the early Mohists were rule-consequentialists. However, the textual evidence on this point seems to me to be very indeterminate. In general, I think the Mohists just assumed that the rules that would maximize impartial benefits in most cases would in fact maximize benefits in each individual case. Consequently, as Vorenkamp suggests, they “did not see any possible conflict between the two.”<sup>27</sup> (But this is an issue to which I return in §IV.D.)

Even the Mohists’ notion of the three benefits (wealth, populousness, and orderliness) is more problematic than it seems at first. They discuss only those cases in which all three would be obtained by a given course of action. But what do they think we should do if only one or two of the benefits would increase, whereas the remaining items actually decrease? For instance, increasing economic freedom may increase wealth but decrease social order. Presumably, we do whatever produces the most benefit overall, but how do I quantify “good order”? Even in the case of wealth and populousness, which are clearly quantifiable, what is the “exchange rate” between them? If a policy increases the population by 10,000 people, but decreases wealth by 100 taels of silver, is that a net benefit or harm?

<sup>27</sup>Vorenkamp, “Another Look at Utilitarianism in Mo-tzu’s Thought,” p. 431. Cf. Jochim, “Ethical Analysis of an Ancient Debate,” p. 143. In defending a rule-consequentialist reading of the early Mohists, Vorenkamp relies on the Mohist use of the term zhèng 正, in *Mozi* 28, “The Will of Heaven.” He follows Watson in translating this as “standard,” and taking it to be a general rule or principle. As my earlier translation of the relevant part of *Mozi* 28 indicates, I interpret zhèng differently. I may be wrong, of course, but I think more needs to be said to justify reading the term with as elaborate a connotation as Vorenkamp suggests.

And do we maximize net wealth or average wealth? Are the three benefits intrinsically valuable, or valuable only as a means to something else? The Mohists have an implausible position if they hold that populousness is intrinsically valuable. The situation in present-day China or India illustrates that populousness is valuable only up to a point. And, as Aristotle pointed out, wealth is, by its nature, good only as a means to other things. But if the three benefits are valuable only as a means, what are they a means *to*?

Perhaps the most charitable interpretation is that the early Mohists implicitly thought what the Neo-Mohists said explicitly, that benefit (lì 利) is “what one is pleased to get,” and harm (hài 害) is “what one dislikes to get.”<sup>28</sup> If pressed on the value of wealth, populousness, and order, they might have said that these happen (in the current historical situation) to be the things that people would be pleased to get. Trade-offs between the three should be judged in terms of which distribution most pleases people. (Would people be more pleased by a given increase in social order or by a given increase in wealth?) Furthermore, in different historical situations, *increasing* population might not be a legitimate goal since that no longer pleased people.

However, this raises a variety of questions that the Mohists never, to my knowledge, answer. What if people are *pleased* by the Ruist practices that the Mohists condemn? What if a sadist is *pleased* by torturing people?

### III. THE THREE GAUGES OR STANDARDS

I have been focusing so far on the consequentialist aspects of Mohist ethics. I think that the consequentialist standard is the most central to their view, but they do employ two other standards as well. So we must examine them carefully:

And so, in assessing claims, one must use the three gauges.

What are the “three gauges”?

Our teacher Mozi says, “The gauges of precedent, evidence, and application. . . . One looks up for precedents among the affairs and actions of the ancient sage-kings. . . . One looks down to examine evidence of what the people have heard and seen. . . . One implements it as state policy and sees whether or not it produces benefit for the state, families, and people.”<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Mohist “Canons,” definition A26 and A27. Cf. Graham, *Later Mohist Logic*, p. 282, Graham, *Disputers*, p. 145.

<sup>29</sup> *Mozi* 35, “A Condemnation of Fatalism,” *Readings*, p. 111. This passage in *Mozi* 35 is very similar to the corresponding passage in *Mozi* 37; however, a comparison with *Mozi* 36 might seem to provide evidence for Graham’s view of systematic doctrinal differences

“Precedent, evidence, and application” are literally 有本之者, 有原之者, 有用之者, “There is finding its root, there is finding its source, and there is applying it.” “Gauges” (biǎo 表) is literally “gnomon,” an astronomical tool consisting of a straight stick perpendicular to the ground. Although simple, a gnomon provides immense amounts of information and can be used to determine true North, the time of day, solstices, and equinoxes.<sup>30</sup>

The Mohists apply these gauges (or gnomons) to doctrines concerning the existence of ghosts and spirits, and the existence of fate. The Mohists argue against the existence of “fate” (mìng 命), which they associate with Ruism. They accuse Ruists of endorsing self-fulfilling defeatism: there is no point in trying to improve the world or one’s own situation, because success or failure has all been determined already. However, it appears, based on the received *Analects* text, that the Mohist criticisms are a misinterpretation of the role of fate in the thought of Kongzi. The view we find in the *Analects* (and also, interestingly, in later texts like *Mengzi* 2B13) is that accepting fate does not relieve one of the obligation to strive to be a better person and to improve the world; rather, to accept fate is to have the equanimity and patience born of the confidence that, whether one succeeds in the short term or not, Heaven has an ethical purpose that will prevail in the long run. Thus, Kongzi says, “When one sees profit, but concentrates on what is righteous; when one sees danger, but accepts fate; when one is long in exigent circumstances, but does not forget the maxims he espoused in ordinary life – one may indeed be regarded as a complete person” (14.12; cf. 19.1). This kind of *amor fati* is found in many philosophical and spiritual traditions (including Christianity and Spinoza’s system). But it is also common for advocates of this view to be accused of an unhealthy defeatism.<sup>31</sup>

The Mohists argue not only that ghosts and spirits exist, but also that they punish the evil and reward the good. This is a challenge to our

among the chapters because the latter states that we find the “source” of a doctrine in “the books of the early kings” (cf. Mei, *Motse*, p. 189, Graham, *Disputers*, pp. 52–53) rather than in what the people see and hear. However, immediately after introducing the three standards, *Mozi* 36 has, “That I am able to judge whether there is fate or not is by the sense testimony of the multitude” (Mei, *ibid.*). Indeed, this is the only one of the three versions to stress the relevance of this test for the existence of fate! Consequently, it seems unlikely that we have a substantive methodological difference here.

<sup>30</sup> See Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, vol. 3, pp. 284–94.

<sup>31</sup> The antifatalism chapters are *Mozi* 35–37. Cf. Watson, *Mo Tzu*, “Against Fatalism,” pp. 117–23. On the view of fate in the *Analects*, see also 9.5, 12.5 and 14.36. (The commentary in Slingerland’s translation on these passages is very helpful.) On Mengzi’s view, see Ivanhoe, “Question of Faith.”



preconceptions, because on many other topics (their challenges to traditional beliefs, their interest in technology and the philosophy of language, their consequentialism) they remind us of Western Enlightenment thinkers, for whom rejection of supernatural intervention in the world was a central tenet. But, of course, part of reading a text is being open to the possibility that it may upset our own categories and presumptions. And we should not forget that brilliant philosophers in our own tradition (such as Augustine and Aquinas) have been quite comfortable with the notion of supernatural agency.

The Mohist belief in the existence and agency of ghosts and spirits has to be understood in its historical context. Ruists advocated the practice of religious rituals, but they downplayed the agency of ghosts and spirits. Since the Mohists challenged the Ruists on almost every topic across the board, it was perhaps natural for them to disagree with them about ghosts and spirits too. In addition, the agency of ghosts and spirits is integrated deeply into the Mohist philosophical system. They use it to help answer the question of why it is in one's interest to act in accordance with the Way. And as we shall see later in §IV.D.2, it plays a role in their "just war theory."

Whether the issue is ghosts and spirits or fate, I believe that the Mohists are concerned with the truth of the claims they advocate. However, I am not suggesting that they were concerned with truth *as opposed to* the benefits of following a doctrine. They held, I think, that the true doctrines were also the doctrines that would have the best consequences if we followed them. Let's now examine in detail how the three gauges work as indicators of truth.<sup>32</sup>

### III.A. Precedent: The "Expert Testimony" of the Sages

The Mohists appeal to the first standard when they write that

from the average person to nobles alike, all say that the sage-kings of the three dynasties are adequate models of conduct (fǎ 法). . . . In ancient times, when King Wu had attacked the Yin and executed [tyrant] Zhou, he had the various feudal lords divide up the sacrifices [to the deceased royal ancestors] of Yin. . . . Since he did this, King Wu must have believed in the existence

<sup>32</sup> In this chapter, I shall simply present my own interpretation. In my Appendix, I explicate and criticize the arguments of Hall and Ames and of Hansen to the effect that it is inappropriate to attribute the concept of *truth* to early Chinese thinkers.

of ghosts and spirits. . . . *If there were no ghosts and spirits*, why would King Wu have bothered to divide up the sacrifices of Yin?<sup>33</sup>

Here the Mohists want to convince us that King Wu believed in the existence of ghosts and spirits. Why should this influence our own beliefs and actions, though? The answer is that King Wu was a sage. As such, his conduct, his pronouncements, and his beliefs are authoritative. It is tempting to dismiss this as a fallacious appeal to authority. However, appeals to authority are not always fallacious. Gadamer makes this point forcefully:

The Enlightenment's distinction between faith in authority and using one's own reason is, in itself, legitimate. If the prestige of authority displaces one's own judgment, then authority is in fact a source of prejudices. But this does not preclude its being a source of truth, and that is what the Enlightenment failed to see when it denigrated all authority.<sup>34</sup>

Thus, acknowledging authority is always connected with the idea that what the authority says is not irrational and arbitrary but can, in principle, be discovered to be true. This is the essence of the authority claimed by the teacher, the superior, the expert. . . . they effect the same disposition to believe something that can be brought about in other ways – e.g., by good reasons. Thus the essence of authority belongs in the context of a theory of prejudices free from the extremism of the Enlightenment.<sup>35</sup>

In short, “True authority does not have to be authoritarian.”<sup>36</sup>

The fact is that all of us frequently accept claims on authority. Not only that, unless we wish to succumb to complete skepticism, we *must* accept some claims on authority.<sup>37</sup> It simply is not possible to verify every claim oneself. For example, how do I know that HKVN is my biological mother? I trust the people who tell me she is my mother. And, as a matter of fact, with the exception of HKVN herself, none of the people I trust on this point were actually in the room when I was born. Furthermore, all HKVN knows is that she gave birth to a boy. For all HKVN knows, I am a changeling. I look like my mother, but so do some people who are not related to her. I could take a DNA test. But I do not know how to perform a DNA test myself (even if I had the equipment), so I would have

<sup>33</sup> Mozi 31, “On Ghosts,” *Readings*, pp. 99–100. Emphasis mine. (*Readings* has a typographical error in the last sentence, substituting “King Wen” for “King Wu.”) HY 51/31/45–48.

<sup>34</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 279.

<sup>35</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 280.

<sup>36</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 280n206.

<sup>37</sup> Augustine made this point long ago in the West. See Augustine, *Confessions* VI.5, and Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will* I.2 and II.2.

to trust the people in the lab who performed the test. And why do I trust DNA results anyway? I trust the experts – the “sages” of microbiology – who tell me that a false DNA match is almost impossible. And is there any microbiologist who can personally vouch for every observation, every piece of data, that is the basis for our conclusions about DNA? Surely not. The situation is the same in every branch of contemporary science.

Broadly speaking, there are two different kinds of evidence that the Mohists are appealing to under the standard of “precedent”: (1) second-hand reports, and (2) expert testimony. The Mohists conflate these, but logically speaking they are distinct. Second-hand reports are appeals to things that happened, that anyone could easily observe, but that we are not in a position to observe ourselves. For example, no one in the era of the Mohists had seen for themselves that the sage kings produced wealth, populousness, and social order by ruling impartially. The evidence for this is what others observed and then recorded for posterity. Similarly, I believe the Salem Witch Trials occurred only because of the reports of people who were there and recorded what they saw and heard for posterity. “Expert testimony” is somewhat different. In the case of expert testimony, we trust the judgment of someone else who, because of aptitude and training, is in a better position than we are to arrive at a conclusion on some topic. For example, I believe that Fermat’s Last Theorem has been proven to be true. Why? Mathematicians tell me that it has been proven. I accept their expert testimony on this point. It is tempting to reply that we do not have to accept the expert testimony of the mathematicians, since we could examine the proof for ourselves. The fact is, though, that understanding the proof of Fermat’s Last Theorem requires both a high level of mathematical aptitude and years of training in higher mathematics. For the vast majority of us, either we do *not* know that it is true, or we know that it is true because we accept expert testimony as legitimate.<sup>38</sup>

So the Mohists are appealing to “second-hand reports” and “expert testimony” on the existence of ghosts and spirits. If it is naive, *in principle*, of the Mohists to accept these “precedents” as authoritative, then it is also naive, *in principle*, of us to believe that cigarette smoking causes cancer, or that humans have walked on the Moon. Does this mean that we must

<sup>38</sup>Some philosophers still write as if Euclid’s *Elements* were the paradigm of mathematical knowledge. Anyone with intelligence only moderately above average can understand for herself the proof that the Pythagorean Theorem is true (for Euclidean space). But mathematics has come a long way since Euclid. Today, even mathematicians cannot follow proofs outside of their own specialized branches of mathematics.

accept the testimony of the sage kings, or that we must accept every appeal to expert authority? Of course not. Expert testimony is open to criticism too. For example, I am dubious that some of the sage kings even existed. And there is reason to believe that some of them acted differently than the Mohists describe. (Consider, for example, the account in the “Old Text” version of the *Bamboo Annals*, according to which “sage king” Shun imprisoned his predecessor Yao.)<sup>39</sup> My point is simply that an appeal to authority is not fallacious in principle. Appeals to authority can be, even by our own standards, legitimate indicators of truth.

When should we accept the expert testimony of others, and when should we not? (Here I am asking a general philosophical question, rather than considering what the Mohists have said. To my knowledge, they never address this specific issue.) This is too complicated a question to resolve here, but let’s consider a specific example. I believe that smoking increases the risk of cancer. Why? Because the Surgeon General of the United States says so. I have no firsthand knowledge to support this. (Indeed, my parents each smoked a pack of cigarettes a day for decades, and both lived well past seventy.) Experts do not have faculties or cognitive abilities that are different in kind from our own. The Surgeon General does not know that smoking increases the risk of cancer because he can see things I could not see or because he has some sixth sense that I lack. Neither does the Surgeon General have access to special kinds of reasoning or thought processes that are different in kind from my own. I have a general sense for what kinds of reasoning the Surgeon General engages in. I *assume* the Surgeon General (or more likely someone whose expert testimony *he* trusts) collected statistics on the rates of cancer among smokers and nonsmokers. I also have a vague knowledge that one must control for various factors in interpreting these results (e.g., age of subjects, other carcinogens in their environments) and that there are standard techniques for interpreting the data (e.g., I used to know how to run a regression analysis, and I still have a general sense for what one is). Despite this, if I examined the evidence and concluded that smoking does *not* increase the risk of cancer, you should ignore me and believe the Surgeon General. Why? Even though there is nothing the Surgeon General can do that I could not do in principle, the fact is that the Surgeon General has certain kinds of aptitudes and acquired skills that I lack. The Surgeon General is simply much more skillful at doing certain kinds of things than I am.

<sup>39</sup> See Fan, *Guben zhushu jinian*, p. 6.

On the other hand, suppose there were a significant number of experts, with credentials as legitimate as those of the Surgeon General, who disputed his conclusion. Or suppose we discovered that the Surgeon General was under a lot of political pressure to conclude that smoking causes cancer. This would give us reason to doubt the Surgeon General's conclusion and to at least suspend judgment on this issue.

We have been considering the Mohist application of the standard of "precedence" to the existence of ghosts and spirits, but the point is easily applied to other cases as well. If "impartial caring" worked for the sage kings, why shouldn't it work for us? If the sage kings, who were successful rulers, practiced moderation in funerals (another Mohist doctrine), shouldn't we do the same? (Compare the argument: "If a particular welfare reform program works in their state, why shouldn't it work in ours?")

### III.B. Evidence of the Eyes and Ears

The Mohists illustrate the application of the second standard in their discussion of whether ghosts and spirits exist:

I accept that one must inquire carefully into the issue of whether or not ghosts and spirits exist [鬼神之有與無之別]. Granted this, what is the proper method for pursuing an inquiry into this issue [說]?

Our teacher Mozi says, "You proceed in the same way as in any other case of determining whether anything exists or does not exist; you must take as your standard [yí 儀] the evidence [實] provided by the eyes and ears of the people. If there really are people who have heard and seen something, then you must accept that such things exist [必以為有]. If no one has heard or seen something, then you must accept that such things do not exist [必以為無]."40

The Mohists then cite numerous cases of first-hand observation of ghosts and spirits, including the following:

If we are looking for a case where many people have seen and heard [about ghosts and spirits], then in ancient times Du Bo is a good example. King Xuan of Zhou killed his minister Du Bo even though he was completely innocent. Before he died Du Bo said, "My lord is killing me even though I am completely innocent. If the dead are indeed unconscious, then that will be the end of it. But if the dead are conscious, within three years' time my lord shall know of this!" Three years later King Xuan and various feudal lords were off hunting in the wilds. There were several hundred chariots and

40 Mozi 31, "On Ghosts," *Readings*, p. 95.

several thousand men on foot; the hunting party filled the entire field. At high noon, Du Bo appeared in a plain chariot pulled by white horses. . . . He pursued King Xuan of Zhou and shot him as he rode in his chariot; the arrow pierced the king's heart and splintered his spine. King Xuan collapsed in this chariot and, draped over his own bow case, he died. None of the men from Zhou who were there at the time failed to witness this and none even in remote places failed to hear about it.<sup>41</sup>

Notice that this report has been carefully selected to anticipate many possible skeptical objections. "Perhaps the King merely imagined that he saw something." No, there was an entire field full of witnesses, all of whom saw the same thing. "Perhaps they saw something unclearly (maybe just an animal or some fog) and convinced themselves it was a ghost." No, the event happened in broad daylight, when it was easy to see. "Perhaps the King did see *something* that looked like a ghost, but he died as a result of fright, or from overexertion while hunting." No, the actions of the ghost had concrete physical effects on his body.

### III.C. Application and Consequences

It is relevant here that Du Bo returned from the dead to punish King Xuan for killing him even though he was innocent. Most of the Mohist ghost stories have such a didactic point. And this, of course, fits in with the third gauge: "If the ability of ghosts and spirits to reward the worthy and punish the wicked could be firmly established as fact throughout the empire and among the common people, it would surely bring order to the state and great benefit to the people."<sup>42</sup> For instance, the Mohists claim that the story of Du Bo was referred to by rulers "when instructing their ministers, and fathers referred to it as a warning to their sons, saying, 'Be cautious! Be watchful! Misfortune will surely befall all those who kill the innocent, and they will suffer the punishments of ghosts and spirits in this swift fashion!'"<sup>43</sup> This standard might seem problematic as an indicator of truth. Why should the fact that belief in a doctrine has good consequences be taken as evidence for the truth of that doctrine? We might think that having certain false beliefs might have good consequences. For example, in order to have the confidence to succeed, it may be necessary for each fighter pilot to believe that he is the best pilot in the sky, even though

<sup>41</sup> *Mozi* 31, "On Ghosts," *Readings*, p. 96. The story of the supernatural demise of King Xuan was apparently quite a famous incident. See Li, "Zhou Xuanwang zhi si de kaozheng."

<sup>42</sup> *Mozi* 31, "On Ghosts," *Readings*, p. 104.

<sup>43</sup> *Mozi* 31, "On Ghosts," *Readings*, p. 96.

(for all but one pilot) this is not true. Our suspicion that the third gauge is not really a standard of truth is increased when Mozi is reported as saying,

If it were the case that ghosts and spirits do not really exist, then in offering sacrifices, all we would be doing is expending resources of wine and millet. But though we would be expending these resources, we would not simply be pouring the wine into a ditch or gully or throwing the millet away. Primary clan members and people living out in the villages and towns all have a chance to drink the sacrificial wine and partake of the offerings. And so even if the ghosts and spirits did not exist, these offerings would still be a means for welcoming and bringing together close family and gathering together and increasing fellowship among people living out in the villages and towns.<sup>44</sup>

However, the preceding does not commit the Mohists to the nonexistence of ghosts and spirits. It may simply be an argument directed at those who (unlike the Mohists) remain unconvinced of the existence of ghosts and spirits. We find an analogous line of argument in Plato. In response to Meno's paradox, which seems to show that it is impossible to come to know anything new, Plato has Socrates present a version of his theory of recollection. Socrates then states, "I do not insist that my argument is right in all other respects, but I would contend at all costs both in word and deed as far as I could that we will be better men, braver and less idle, if we believe that one must search for the things one does not know, rather than if we believe that it is not possible to find out what we do not know and that we must not look for it."<sup>45</sup> Does the fact that he gives this kind of argument make us believe that Plato does not really believe in the theory of recollection? Consider another comparison. Suppose Susan is arguing against capital punishment, on the grounds that taking a life is categorically wrong unless it is in defense of oneself or another. Suppose, further, that she adds, "And, besides, even if capital punishment were morally permissible in theory, the fact is that it is unjust as it is currently practiced, because African-Americans are more likely than whites to be given capital punishment for the same crimes." Would you conclude that Susan does not *really* believe that capital punishment is categorically

<sup>44</sup> *Mozi* 31, "On Ghosts," *Readings*, p. 104. This passage is cited as evidence that Mozi does not really believe in the existence of ghosts and spirits by Vorenkamp ("Another Look at Utilitarianism in Mo-tzu's Thought," pp. 434, 439–40). JeeLoo Liu seems to agree with him (*Introduction to Chinese Philosophy*, p. 126). But Taylor understands the passage as I do ("Religion and Utilitarianism," p. 342).

<sup>45</sup> Plato, *Meno*, p. 76 (86b–c).

wrong, just because she added an additional argument that does not assume that as a premise?

Generally speaking, I offer three considerations to help relieve any doubts about the third standard being an indicator of truth. (And these considerations also apply to the first standard, the “precedent” of the sage kings.) First, it is not a genuine objection to the claim that the third gauge is an indicator of truth to point out that it is *possible* for there to be a divergence between what the standard indicates and the truth. To make this objection is to fail to recognize the difference between an *indicator* of truth (i.e., a gauge or standard of truth) and a *definition* of truth. None of the three standards are plausible as *definitions* of truth, because a claim could be false even though it met one, two, or even all three of the standards. But there is no evidence that the early Mohists were offering the standards as a *definition* of truth. The three standards are *indicators* of truth, and it is always conceivable, for any indicator, that it will fail to match up with whatever it is an indicator of. Consequently, it is conceivable that a belief will have good consequences yet is not true. But this is true of *any* indicator of truth one can imagine. (This is one of the reasons that philosophical skepticism always remains a plausible position.) Pick whatever *you* consider to be a paradigmatic indicator of the truth of a claim or theory. I guarantee that a claim could satisfy your indicator yet fail to be true. Do you consider empirical data an indicator of truth? Empirical data notoriously underdetermines the truth of theories. Do you choose the true theory based on theoretical simplicity? What *guarantee* is there that the theory that seems simplest to our human minds is the true one? Consequently, if you think that having good consequences could not plausibly be an indicator of truth because a true theory might fail to have good consequences, then you must also accept that falling barometric pressure could not plausibly be an indicator of future rain, because sometimes the pressure falls without it raining.

Second, I think that discomfort with the third gauge as an indicator of truth stems in large part from a failure to keep in mind a crucial aspect of the Mohist worldview: the existence of a providential *tiān* 天, “Heaven.” In their essay “The Will of Heaven,” the Mohists make clear that Heaven acts to reward the good, punish the wicked, raise the virtuous to become rulers, and depose evil rulers. Now, if one has (like many philosophers today) a purely naturalistic view of the world, it is quite legitimate to wonder whether the beliefs that have the best consequences are also true. However, if one has (like the Mohists) a providential conception of



Heaven, it becomes highly implausible to hold that the doctrines that it is best for us to follow are false. Why would a Heaven that so clearly has a deep ethical concern with the people structure the world so that false beliefs often have the best consequences?<sup>46</sup>

Finally, as I stressed in Chapter 1, §I.A, it is not a legitimate application of either the “principle of charity” or the “principle of humanity” to reject an interpretation on the grounds that it attributes to a philosopher a view that *we* regard as mistaken. The principles of charity and humanity rule out only massive or inexplicable errors. Consequently, in order to rule out the third (or first) standard as an indicator of truth, we would need to show not merely that we think the Mohists are quite wrong to regard this as an indicator of truth, but that they are *inexplicably wrong*. I do not think that anyone has made the case that the Mohists are inexplicably wrong in regarding the consequences of holding a belief (the third standard) or expert testimony (the first standard) as indicators of truth. Indeed, I think I have demonstrated that the Mohists’ standards are at least plausible as indicators of truth, even if they are mistaken, and their errors are therefore quite explicable.

#### IV. POLITICAL THEORY

##### IV.A. Rejection of Custom

Using their consequentialist standard, the Mohists argue for a specific set of practices. These practices were contrary to those that had been dominant in their own culture. Consequently, the Mohists give a general argument against blindly accepting the reigning customs:

Anciently, east of the state of Yue there was the tribe of the Kai Shu. Among them the first-born son was dismembered and devoured after birth and this was said to be propitious for his younger brothers. When the father died the mother was carried away and abandoned, and the reason was that one should not live with the wife of a ghost. By the officials this was regarded as a government regulation and by the people it was accepted as a commonplace.

<sup>46</sup>There is an analogy here with Descartes, who appeals to the existence of God to vouchsafe the reliability of (at least some of our) perceptions. Of course, there are versions of naturalistic and evolutionary epistemologies that attempt to explain how it is possible for us to access truth without appealing to theology or teleology. For discussions of these projects, see Quine, “Epistemology Naturalized,” Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, pp. 38–41 and Nagel, *View from Nowhere*, pp. 78–82.

They practiced it continually and followed it without discrimination. Was it then the good and the right way? No, this is really because habit affords convenience and custom carries approval.<sup>47</sup>

The same chapter goes on to cite the example of a tribe that practiced excarnation and secondary burial, and one that practiced cremation. These examples will remind Western readers of Herodotus's description of how cultures perform radically different burial rituals, and each regards as horrifying the practices of the other cultures. However, Herodotus concludes, borrowing a phrase from Pindar, "Custom is King of all."<sup>48</sup> There are disputes over how to understand this claim (and my own sense is that Herodotus had not carefully thought through what he wanted to say on this point, or what the implications of it were). But Herodotus might be read as endorsing cultural relativism (the claim that what makes a practice justified is that it is judged acceptable by a particular culture). In contrast, the Mohists use their examples not to illustrate cultural relativism, or even pluralism (the view that different practices are acceptable so long as they perform the same legitimate functions). Rather, the Mohists conclude that the practices they describe are simply *wrong*: "the practice of these three tribes is too heartless."<sup>49</sup> The Mohists hope that these examples will convince their readers of the possibility that the practices of their own culture are wrong.

There are a variety of ways to challenge existing customs. The Mohists did so through careful argumentation.

#### IV.B. The "State of Nature" Argument

The Mohist discussion of the fundamental structure of society and the legitimation of government authority is one of the most brilliant and striking aspects of their philosophy. Its basis is what we in the West would call a "state of nature" argument:

In ancient times, when people first came into being and before there were governments or laws, each person followed their own norm [yì 義] for deciding what was right and wrong. And so where there was one person there was one norm, where there were two people there were two norms, where there were ten people there were ten different norms. As many

<sup>47</sup> *Mozi* 25. Mei, *Motse*, pp. 132–33. (Translation slightly modified.)

<sup>48</sup> Herodotus, *History*, p. 228 (iii.38).

<sup>49</sup> *Mozi* 25. Mei, *Motse*, p. 133. On the distinction between relativism and pluralism, see Chapter 5, §II.A.

people as there were, that was how many norms were recognized. In this way people came to approve their own norms for what is right and wrong and thereby condemn the norms of others. And so they mutually condemned each other's norms. For this reason, within families, there was resentment and hatred between fathers and sons and elder and younger brothers that caused them to separate and disperse and made it impossible for them to cooperate harmoniously with one another. Throughout the world, people used water, fire, and poison to harm and injure one another, to the point where if they had strength to spare, they would not use it to help each other. . . . The chaos that ruled in the world was like what one finds among the birds and beasts.<sup>50</sup>

This description cannot but remind us of Thomas Hobbes's view. Hobbes and the Mohists agree that human life prior to the institution of civil society is, in the famous words of the former, "nasty, brutish, and short." They also agree that it is necessary to escape the state of nature by enforcing compliance with some unifying authority. However, there are crucial differences between Hobbes and the Mohists on three topics. Hobbes holds that the source of human conflict in the state of nature is that conflicting human *desires* will lead people to fight over scarce resources. These desires are, to a great extent, *fixed*: they are always purely self-interested. And, according to Hobbes, the greatest human good is *individual survival*. Consequently, for Hobbes the primary political problem is to come up with institutions that will ensure survival given the inescapable conflicts of desires.

In contrast, according to the Mohists, the source of conflict is not conflicting desires, but the conflicting *norms* to which humans subscribe. In addition (as we shall see more clearly in §V.F), the Mohists have a philosophical anthropology according to which human motivations and dispositions are highly *malleable*. Through the proper use of rewards and punishments, humans can be made to have almost any set of motivations and to do almost anything. Finally, recall that the Mohists regarded maximizing the wealth, populousness, and order *of the whole society* as the greatest good. Thus, for the Mohists, the primary political problem is to devise institutions that will modify and then maintain human motivations so as to maximize the wealth, populousness, and order of the whole society.

<sup>50</sup> Mozi 11, "Obeying One's Superior," *Readings*, p. 65. There are forms of this argument in all three versions of the "Obeying One's Superior" chapters. See Mei, *Motse*, pp. 55–56, 59, and 71.

By what event does one move from the state of nature to civil society? For Hobbes, the “sovereign” has authority only because it is granted to him by a “covenant” among the members of the “commonwealth.” So legitimate political authority is derived, ultimately, from an act of free consent on the part of the governed. However, once granted, this authority is absolute and irrevocable. The individual surrenders power to the state in order to secure his own survival (which was uncertain, at best, in the state of nature). Hobbes argues that only with unlimited power can the sovereign guarantee the peace and survival of the members of the commonwealth. The only “escape clause” for the individual is a case in which the individual’s survival is threatened by the state. So if the state attempts to kill the individual, it is no longer holding up its side of the “covenant,” and the individual is no longer bound to obey its authority.

There is some unclarity in how the Mohists think one escapes the state of nature. The first two versions of “Obeying One’s Superior” (Chapters 11 and 12) describe the presocial chaos and then cryptically announce “Hence, the most worthy and capable in the world is selected and established as Son of Heaven.” The agent of the verbs (the one who does the selecting and establishing) is not stated in the Chinese. The third version of the essay (Chapter 13) states, in the received text, “Hence, the world desired to unify the norms of the world. For this reason, [they] selected the most worthy and established him as the Son of Heaven.” This makes the process sound, implicitly, like the “covenant” that establishes political authority in Hobbes. The role of “covenants” (méng 盟) and “bonds” (yuē 約) increased in importance throughout the period we are studying in this volume.<sup>51</sup> However, there is a significant difference between the view that contracts create legitimate obligations among individuals and states (a common-enough view in ancient China) and a “contract theory” according to which the only basis for all legitimate political authority is the consent of the governed. Hobbes is writing in a tradition with a long history of emphasizing contracts or “covenants” as foundational notions in both its secular (Plato’s *Crito*) and religious (God’s covenant with the Israelites) traditions. If the Mohists are implicitly appealing to a “contract theory” of political authority per se in the Chapter 13 version of “Obeying One’s Superior,” this is the only passage in which they, or any other ancient Chinese philosophers, do so.

An even more decisive reason for rejecting a “contract theory” interpretation of the Mohists is the fact that, in other passages, the Mohists

<sup>51</sup> Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence in Early China*, pp. 43–50, 67–80.

clearly attribute to Heaven the power to establish and depose rulers. After describing how Heaven approved of the actions of the sages, the Mohists state, “Hence, it caused (shǐ 使) each to become the Son of Heaven and have the wealth of the world.” In contrast, after describing how Heaven disapproved of the misdeeds of the tyrant kings, they say, “Hence, it caused them to not finish out their natural span of life and their line [of succession] was not even a single generation.”<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, there is an alternative way of reading the passage from the Chapter 13 version of “Obeying One’s Superior” that is consistent with this. Several authors recommend emending the text to “Heaven desired to unify the norms of the world. For this reason, [it] selected the most worthy and established him as the Son of Heaven.” (This is an easier emendation than it seems in English, because “world” is 天下, “[all] under Heaven.” If the single character “under” is an interpolation, we get the alternative reading.)<sup>53</sup> This reading has the advantage that it attributes a role to Heaven in establishing and legitimating government that is consistent with what the Mohists (as well as early Ruists) say elsewhere. Consequently, I think it is clear that Heaven facilitates the transition from the state of nature to civil society, by signs and omens that indicate its choice for Son of Heaven.

We were led to consider this issue by a comparison with Hobbes. Now we are in a position to see an intriguing paradox: Hobbes is more individualistic in his foundational political theory than are the Mohists, but his political conclusions are more authoritarian. For Hobbes, it is individual

<sup>52</sup> Mozi 26, “Heaven’s Will.” Cf. *Readings*, p. 92.

<sup>53</sup> Sun favors this emendation (*Mozi jiangou*, p. 83) as does Mei (*Motse*, p. 71). Watson is uncomfortable with the emendation itself, but he agrees that the Mohists think that Heaven selects the Son of Heaven (*Mo Tzu*, p. 35n1). Ivanhoe, translating the Chapter 11 version, gives, “Those who understood the nature of this chaos *saw that it* arose from a lack of rulers and leaders and so they chose the best person among the most worthy...” (*Readings*, p. 65, emphasis mine; HY 15/11/5). The first sentence is 夫明虐天下之所以亂者生於無政長. Ivanhoe’s reading makes very good sense of the sentence up to the 者, and it provides an explicit agent for the verbs in the following sentence. However, there is nothing in the Chinese corresponding to the phrase that I italicized in his translation. If we read the first clause as he proposes, the whole sentence must mean “Those who understood the nature of this chaos arose from a lack of rulers and leaders....” Ivanhoe has to emend the text in some way to get his translation. Now, compare the text of Chapter 11 with its counterpart in Chapter 12: 明乎民之無政長以一同天下之義而天下亂也. This unambiguously means “It is clear that the people’s lack of rulers to unify the norms of the world leads to the chaos of the world.” It is possible to read the Chapter 11 passage with the same sense: “It is clear that what makes the world chaotic is created by the lack of leaders.” Since this reading requires no emendation, and accounts for the parallel between the passages, I prefer it.

consent that legitimates governmental power, but the power granted to government is unlimited and irrevocable. In contrast, according to the Mohists, it is Heaven, not “the people,” who confer the ultimate political authority (that of the Son of Heaven). However, the Mohists clearly state the Son of Heaven has a right to rule only as long as he rules well; he loses this right if he is cruel or inept.<sup>54</sup>

#### IV.C. The Basic Structure of Society

The basic institutional structure that the Mohists advocated is paternalistic and pyramidal. At the top of the human social order is the “Son of Heaven,” the ruler of the kingdom. Beneath him are three “imperial ministers,” whose precise duties are not explained, but who are clearly subordinate assistants to the Son of Heaven. Beneath them are the “feudal lords and rulers,” each of whom is responsible for one of the “myriad states” into which the kingdom is divided. Beneath each of the feudal lords or rulers are “governors” and then community “leaders.” At the bottom (in terms of authority) are the common people.

This structure seems slightly more streamlined than either the actual or the idealized traditional governmental organizations in China. However, it may be that the Mohists are presenting only an outline of the ideal governmental structure. Perhaps they would accede to considerable elaborations on this basic structure.<sup>55</sup> In any case, what is really distinctive of the Mohist approach is the strong emphasis on “obeying one’s superior.” This has six parts, all of which are addressed to subordinates: (1) keep your superior informed of problems and successes, (2) approve of what your superior approves of, (3) condemn what your superior condemns, (4) remonstrate with a superior who commits any transgression, (5) commend your own subordinates when they do well, (6) do not form cliques with your fellow subordinates.<sup>56</sup> Those who follow these practices will be rewarded, and those who deviate from them will be punished. Rewards take three forms: praise, prosperity, and promotions. Punishments include condemnation, reduction of wealth, demotion in rank, as well as banishment and the “Five Punishments” (of tattooing the face,

<sup>54</sup> Donald Jenner was the first to note this paradox (“Mo Tzu and Hobbes,” pp. 62–65). Fung Yu-lan was perhaps the first to compare Hobbes and Mozi (*History of Chinese Philosophy*, vol. 1, pp. 100–3).

<sup>55</sup> Mozi 13 gives a slightly more elaborate list of positions. See Mei, *Motse*, pp. 71–72.

<sup>56</sup> Mozi 11, “Obeying One’s Superior,” *Readings*, p. 66.

cutting off the nose, feet, or testicles, and death) for the most serious cases.<sup>57</sup> The Mohists seem to think that this carrot-and-stick approach will be sufficient to ensure compliance. (This is an illustration of the Mohist confidence in the malleability of human dispositions.)

The Mohists state repeatedly that the purpose of these practices is to “unify the norms followed” in the village, district, state, and (ultimately) the whole world so that “good order” may be maintained.<sup>58</sup> The connection between unity of norms and good order is, to some extent, obvious. If we move from a state of conflict over norms to a state in which we have the same norms (and *if* these norms are ones that emphasize social harmony, like the Mohist norms), then we will have less conflict. However, the Mohists also offer two explicit arguments in favor of having common norms. The first argument connects norms with the efficacy of rewards and punishments:

In governing the country, the ruler proclaims: “Whoever deserves reward I will reward.” Suppose the purposes of the superior and the subordinates are different, whoever is rewarded by the superior would be condemned by the public. And in community life the condemnation of the public is supreme. Though there is reward from the superior, it will not be an encouragement.<sup>59</sup>

The passage goes on to make a parallel point about punishment. The argument, then, is that commonality of norms is necessary in order for reward and punishment to be effective tools. So rewards and punishments maintain the commonality of norms, but they also require the commonality of norms in order to be effective. This is intriguing, but a Hobbesian (or a later Chinese philosopher like Han Feizi) would suggest that punishments and rewards could be effective even if people do not share the norms of the government. If the government executes, imprisons, tattoos, or amputates a limb from someone, surely this will be an effective deterrent. Likewise, if the government promotes, honors, and financially rewards behavior, surely people will strive to act this way.

<sup>57</sup> On the rewards, see *Mozi* 8, “Honoring the Worthy,” *Readings*, p. 63. On punishments, see *Mozi* 8, “Honoring the Worthy,” *Readings*, p. 62; *Mozi* 9, “Honoring the Worthy,” Mei, *Motse*, p. 36; *Mozi* 11, “Obeying One’s Superior,” *Readings*, pp. 67–68. The Mohists stress that one must be judicious in applying the most serious punishments, quoting a memorable phrase that condemns the practices of one tribe: “They made a code of five tortures and called it law” (*Mozi* 12, “Obeying One’s Superior,” Mei, *Motse*, p. 64).

<sup>58</sup> *Mozi* 11, “Obeying One’s Superior,” *Readings*, pp. 66–67.

<sup>59</sup> *Mozi* 12, “Obeying One’s Superior,” Mei, *Motse*, p. 66. Cf. *Mozi* 13, “Obeying One’s Superior,” Mei, *Motse*, p. 72.

The second argument is that the efficacy of the government will be vastly increased through a policy of obeying one's superior:

When there are many to help one's hearing and sight then of course one can hear and see far; when there are many to help one's speech then one's good counsel can comfort many; when there are many to help one's thought then one's plans can be shaped speedily; when there are many to help one's actions then one can accomplish one's undertaking quickly.<sup>60</sup>

This is not, strictly speaking, an argument for the capacity of common norms to achieve order. However, it is (to my mind, at least) a plausible argument in favor of the benefits of agreeing on norms that emphasize cooperation.

From our early twenty-first century perspective, the Mohist view of government may seem authoritarian. However, three factors mitigate its authoritarianism. First, recall that, although everyone is answerable to one person, the Son of Heaven, the Mohists stress that the Son of Heaven is ultimately answerable to a higher power, Heaven (see §II.B). So, emphasizing the wild state of human life before norms were unified, the Mohists write that, "If the people of the world all obey their superiors on up to the Son of Heaven but do not obey Heaven, then Heavenly disasters still will not cease."<sup>61</sup>

It is also important to recognize that, with the exception of the Son of Heaven, whose rule is hereditary, the ideal Mohist government is meritocratic: "in ancient times, when the sage-kings ruled, they promoted the virtuous and honored the worthy. Even someone who worked as a farmer, artisan, or merchant, if they had talent they were promoted, given high rank and a handsome salary, entrusted with responsibility, and empowered to have their orders obeyed."<sup>62</sup> Consequently, the Mohists believe that they have produced a system in which government authority will be in the hands of those who are competent and public spirited.

The final factor mitigating the authoritarianism of the Mohist system is stated among the rules that govern obeying one's superior: "Should

<sup>60</sup> *Mozi* 12, Mei, *Motse*, pp. 67–68. Cf. *Mozi* 13, Mei, *Motse*, p. 76. Neither this nor the preceding argument are in *Mozi* 11 (the version of "Obeying One's Superior" translated in *Readings*). However, these arguments provide further support for the position sketched in *Mozi* 11, and I see nothing in *Mozi* 12 or 13 contrary to what is said in 11. Consequently, I think it is legitimate to combine arguments from these chapters.

<sup>61</sup> *Mozi* 11, *Readings*, p. 67. Ivanhoe (quite plausibly) reads the 菑, "wilderness," in the text as 災, "disasters," and adds 天, "Heavenly," based on the parallel passage in *Mozi* 12. Cf. Sun, *Mozi jiangou*, p. 70, and Mei, *Motse*, p. 58.

<sup>62</sup> *Mozi* 8, *Readings*, p. 63.



a superior commit any transgression, one must offer proper remonstrance.”<sup>63</sup> There is, then, a mechanism by which subordinates can address grievances to superiors.

Although the Mohists have theoretical answers to the charge of authoritarianism, there are practical difficulties with two of them. Even if the Son of Heaven *should* follow the ethical dictates of Heaven, what will enforce his compliance? The Mohists have an answer to this question, but it appeals to their dubious beliefs about the direct intervention of Heaven into the affairs of the world. They claim that rulers who accord with the will of Heaven will be rewarded, while those who oppose the will of Heaven will be punished. Thus, sages such as Yu, Tang, Wen, and Wu benefited the people impartially, so

Heaven made it come to pass that they each became the Son of Heaven and were given the wealth of all the world. Their descendants have continued for a myriad of generations, their goodness has been proclaimed throughout succeeding generations and spread throughout the world. They are praised down to the present day and are known as “sage-kings.”

In contrast, vicious rulers are partial and harmful to the people, so “Heaven made it come to pass that they did not finish out their natural span of life and their line did not even span a single full generation. They are reviled down to the present day and are known as ‘vicious kings.’”<sup>64</sup> Interestingly, Mengzi has more to say about how the kingship of a vicious ruler can be revoked. He is explicit about the fact that the dissatisfaction of the common people is sufficient evidence of poor government, and that this dissatisfaction strips the king of the mandate to rule. Popular revolution is explicitly allowed in this situation.

Though the Mohists say that subordinates should remonstrate with their superiors when the latter do what is wrong, one wonders whether they would actually dare to do so, and (if they did) whether they would be listened to. In the Mohist system of government, there is so much emphasis on subordinates conforming to their superiors, and superiors have so much authority to reward and punish, that the pressure against a subordinate who wished to remonstrate would be immense. The Mohists would presumably respond that their meritocratic system will select superiors who are amenable to remonstrance, and their standard for evaluation is so clear that it will be easy to see when one has erred. Human experience

<sup>63</sup> *Mozi* 11, *Readings*, p. 66.

<sup>64</sup> *Mozi* 26, “Heaven’s Will,” *Readings*, p. 92.

with hierarchical institutions suggests, though, that more checks and balances might be needed in order to ensure that superiors do not abuse their power.

#### IV.D. The Theory Applied

##### *IV.D.1. Anti-Ruism*

In addition to discussing the basic governmental structure, the Mohists apply their consequentialist standards to specific policy issues. On many of these they directly contradict the Ruists. In “For Moderation in Funerals” the Mohists describe the lavish funerals and long mourning periods dictated by the Ruist rituals for “kings, dukes, and high officials”:

There must be outer and inner coffins and a three-layered shroud of embroidered hide. Once the jade disks and stones are prepared, there must also be spears, swords, sacrificial vessels, pots and basins, embroidery, bolts of silk, and thousands of sets of bridles. The deceased must be provided with horses and carriages along with women entertainers and their instruments. There must be ramps leading down to and connecting with the tomb and the burial mound should resemble a hill or small mountain. The extent to which such practices interfere with the work of the people and dissipate their wealth is beyond calculation. But this is the degree to which people are willing to pursue useless endeavors.<sup>65</sup>

With the exception of sacrificing living people to bury along with the deceased – something firmly rejected by Mengzi (1A4), who cites Kongzi in support – there is no reason to question that what Mozi describes is a proper Ruist funeral ritual for nobility. The Mohists also point out that the time of mourning prescribed by ritual was as long as three years (in the case of the death of one’s mother, father, wife or eldest son), and that during this period mourners were expected to manifest their sadness through crying and a diet so austere that “they cannot rise up without assistance and cannot walk without a cane.”<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, they are ritually forbidden from participating in public office or marrying during the mourning period.

In explaining why such practices are wrong, the ever-systematic Mohists cite each of their three forms of “benefit”:

1. “And so lavish funerals entail burying a great deal of *wealth*, and prolonged mourning entails prohibiting people from pursuing their vocations for an extended period of time.”<sup>67</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Mozi 25, “For Moderation in Funerals,” *Readings*, p. 87.

<sup>66</sup> Mozi 25, “For Moderation in Funerals,” *Readings*, p. 82.

<sup>67</sup> Mozi 25, “For Moderation in Funerals,” *Readings*, p. 83. Emphasis mine.

2. "If the people starve themselves in this manner then they will be unable to withstand the cold of winter or the heat of summer and countless numbers of them will grow ill and die. This greatly diminishes the chances for men and women to procreate. To seek to increase the *population* in this way is like seeking to increase people's longevity by getting them to fall upon their swords."<sup>68</sup>
3. "If those above are unable to attend to their affairs, then the government will be in chaos. If those below are unable to pursue their various tasks, then food and clothing will be in short supply. . . . This will lead unruly and depraved people who lack proper clothing and sufficient food to build up resentment and indignation in their hearts and express it in wanton violence that cannot be stopped. . . . To seek to bring *good order* to one's state by increasing the number of thieves and robbers and decreasing the number of decent and good people is like asking someone who is standing in front of you to turn around three times without exposing his back to you."<sup>69</sup>

Incidentally, these passages illustrate an intriguing aspect of the Mohist form of argument. Their analogies are typically just rhetorical window-dressing rather than substantive aspects of their position. So the similes in these passages liven up the discussion, but they provide us with no new information, because the topics of comparison resemble each other in only the most obvious and superficial structural ways. (Making the people starve will kill them, so will making them fall on their swords. That's it.) We might say that, for the Mohists, metaphors are typically one-dimensional. For the Ruists, though, metaphors are normally multidimensional. Thus, on Mengzi's view, our innate ethical inclinations are like sprouts in a number of aspects: they have a potential for development, this development has a natural course, it can be "cultivated" (a new metaphor that interlocks with the sprout metaphor!) or stunted. One-dimensional metaphors merely illustrate what has already been said. Multidimensional metaphors introduce new information and are "open-ended." They leave open the possibility of discovering new ramifications as one reflects on them further. Consequently, it might be possible for Mengzi to do without the notion that our innate ethical inclinations are "sprouts," but it would be a substantial loss.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Mozi 25, "For Moderation in Funerals," *Readings*, p. 83. Emphasis mine.

<sup>69</sup> Mozi 25, "For Moderation in Funerals," *Readings*, p. 84. Emphasis mine.

<sup>70</sup> I discuss Mengzi's sprout metaphor more in Chapter 4, §III. Edward Slingerland surveys the use of essential metaphors by both Ruists and "Daoists" in his *Effortless Action*. I am inclined to think that metaphors are ultimately ineliminable in human natural language. So there is a sense in which the Mohists cannot do without metaphors (because no one can). But we can distinguish thinkers in terms of how willing they are to consciously

But back to the Mohist arguments: after explaining the negative consequences of the Ruist funeral practices for wealth, populousness, and order, the Mohists argue that a state weakened in these three ways will fall easy prey to aggressive states that might attack it, thereby encouraging warfare. In addition, a state lacking the three benefits would be unable to adequately maintain the ritual offerings to the ghosts and spirits, so that

the Lord on High, ghosts, and spirits would discuss this among themselves up above saying, "Which is better? To have or to not have such people? I suppose there is no difference to us whether they exist or not!" Then were the Lord on High, ghosts, and spirits to send down calamities and punishments and abandon such a people, would this not merely be fitting?<sup>71</sup>

(And if we needed any further proof that the Mohists genuinely believe in the existence of spiritual beings, this is it. If they meant to claim that belief in ghosts and spirits is useful but not also true, then it would be incoherent of them to suggest that the Ruist practices are not useful because of how the ghosts and spirits would, in fact, respond to them.)

All the arguments so far have appealed to the third of the Mohists' three gauges, "application," which judges things by their consequences. But they also employ the first gauge, "precedent," citing supposed historical examples of how the sage kings practiced moderate funerals. They do not seem to employ the second gauge, "evidence," but we would not expect them to employ it here. What the eyes and ears of the people report is used by the Mohists as a test for the *existence* of something, so it does not seem relevant to the issue of whether funerals should be frugal or lavish.

The Mohists provide parallel arguments against two other practices: the production of luxury goods and the performance of certain kinds of music. Their rejection of the latter is easy to misunderstand. The title of the relevant Mohist essay is literally "A Condemnation of Music," and in it they repeat the refrain "Our Master Mozi says, 'Making music is wrong!'"<sup>72</sup> This might make it seem that the Mohists are advocating a sad, draconian society like that envisioned in Pete Townshend's rock opera, *Lifthouse*, in which music is forbidden.<sup>73</sup> However, careful

employ multidimensional metaphors. On the notion of metaphor, contrast Davidson, "What Metaphors Mean," with Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh*.

<sup>71</sup> Mozi 25, "For Moderation in Funerals," *Readings*, p. 85.

<sup>72</sup> Mozi 32. Ivanhoe's translation of these phrases is "A Condemnation of Musical Performances" and "Our teacher Mozi says, 'Musical performances are wrong!'" (*Readings*, pp. 105–10, *passim*). His translation conveys the general sense of the phrases better, but I am translating literally to make a point.

<sup>73</sup> Pete Townshend is the creative force behind The Who, and the author of the seminal rock opera *Tommy*. *Lifthouse* was never completed, and Townshend has had various visions

reading makes clear that what the Mohists object to are the lavish orchestral performances, typically accompanied by dance, that were staged by rulers and high officials. These performances were typically rituals, so in rejecting them the Mohists are taking another swipe at the Ruists. "For Moderation in Expenditure" may also target the Ruists to some extent, since ritual objects are not *directly* productive of wealth, populousness, or order, and probably seemed a huge waste of resources to the Mohists. In the case of both elaborate musical performances and luxury goods, the Mohists use the gauge of "application" in the same way: they claim that these practices waste resources that should be reserved for necessities such as food, clothing, and shelter, and they take officials and the people away from productive activities.

I think the Mohist criticisms need to be taken seriously. If the amount of resources (both material and in terms of labor) expended on burials, mourning, musical performances, ritual dances, and luxurious objects for personal and ritual use is sufficient to produce starvation, malnutrition, epidemics, and general social chaos, then there is no question that these resources are being foolishly misdirected. In addition, it is clear that, as a matter of historical fact, people acting in the name of Ruist ideals have sometimes wasted resources to the detriment of their own health and general well-being, or at least to the detriment of those unfortunate farmers who have to shoulder the tax burden to support them.

Furthermore, Whalen Lai reminds us that Mozi and his followers were

not against everyday ritual, simple music or good, clean fun *per se*. Farmers singing songs during planting season; getting drunk celebrating a good harvest . . . or people just enjoying good sex while trying to procreate (and increase the population as [Mozi] would like them to) – none of these are activities [Mozi] would condemn. There is no good reason to outlaw them – unless and until they over extend [*sic*] themselves.<sup>74</sup>

Nonetheless, one wonders if the Mohists have gone too far. They announce, "To eliminate *everything* that is not useful is to carry out the Way of the sage-kings and offer great benefit to the world."<sup>75</sup> Useful for what? The only goods the Mohists acknowledge specifically are wealth, populousness, and social order. But what if resources are adequate to care for the basic needs of the people with sufficient left over to make clothes

over the years for what it would have been about. *Who's Next* consists largely of songs that were intended for that project. (It opens up another layer of meaning to the lyrics of "The Song Is Over" once one connects them to the premise of the opera.)

<sup>74</sup> Lai, "Public Good that Does the Public Good," p. 137.

<sup>75</sup> *Mozi* 20, "For Moderation in Expenditures," *Readings*, p. 80. Emphasis mine.

that do more than just “keep one warm in winter and cool in summer”?<sup>76</sup> In that case, can our clothes, buildings and general environment be beautified? What if we have a sufficient surplus of goods to hold a ritual music performance, complete with “bells, drums, zithers and pipes,” *without* making the people starve or die of exposure?<sup>77</sup> Can we enjoy the beauty of the music, the spectacle of the dance, and even become something of a connoisseur of different performances of it? What if ritual activities (with their nonutilitarian artefacts) actually *contribute* to social order by expressing and reinforcing our sense of belonging to a community?<sup>78</sup> Perhaps the Mohists would acknowledge the role of beauty and other kinds of goods, once basic human needs are met. But they never say so.

#### IV.D.2. “Just War Theory”

I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter that a section in the larger Mohist corpus is devoted to defensive military techniques. Although those chapters may be late, the Mohists seem to have argued against offensive warfare from fairly early on, since the synoptic chapters include a set entitled “A Condemnation of Aggressive Warfare.” The Mohists distinguish between three kinds of war: aggressive wars of conquest (gōng 攻), defensive wars (shǒu 守), and punitive wars (zhū 誅).

Their argument that wars of conquest are not righteous is quick and to the point. People condemn a person who steals fruit from someone else’s orchard. People recognize that stealing livestock is even more serious, because what is taken is more valuable. People recognize that killing someone to rob him is a still more serious wrong, since still more is taken.

Killing someone is wrong and must be punished with execution. But if we extrapolate out from this view, then killing ten people is ten times as bad . . . and killing one hundred people is one hundred times as bad. . . . Up to this point, all the gentlemen of the world know well enough to condemn such actions and declare that they are wrong. But when it comes to the great wrong of attacking another state, they do not know enough to condemn it. Rather, they praise this and declare that it is the right thing to do.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Mozi 20, “For Moderation in Expenditures,” *Readings*, p. 78.

<sup>77</sup> Mozi 32, “A Condemnation of Musical Performances,” *Readings*, p. 105.

<sup>78</sup> In fairness, the Mohists do encourage some ritual activities. As we saw earlier, they think it is important to perform the ritual offerings to the spirits. But the reason they give for performing the rituals is that the spirits will reward us if we do so and punish us if we fail to. Their rituals are what Frazer suggests all rituals are: a sort of primitive technology for obtaining what one wants (Chapter 2, §II.A.1.a). And they would certainly reject all rituals that do not serve this narrow purpose.

<sup>79</sup> Mozi 17, “A Condemnation of Aggressive Warfare,” *Readings*, p. 73.

The Mohists are aware that some rulers will be uninterested in the issue of whether offensive warfare is righteous, and are instead concerned only with whether it is beneficial to them. (The Mohists are advocates of “benefit,” but only of impartial benefit, not the narrow benefit of one state, family, or individual.) In response, the Mohists point out that warfare is an extremely costly undertaking, with benefits that are frequently small. Indeed, in their era there is much uncultivated land and few people to farm it, so to send people to their deaths to capture more land “is to give up what is needed and to treasure what is already in abundance.”<sup>80</sup> But everyone knows that war is sometime profitable. The Mohists respond that

Although four or five states have benefited from it, I still say that it is not an effective Way (xíng dào 行道). It is like a physician giving medicine to those who are ill. Suppose there is a physician who administers a drug to all who are ill in the world. Ten thousand take it, but only four or five benefit from it. We would still say that it is not an effective medicine (xíng yào 行藥). Thus a filial son will not give it to his parent and a devoted minister will not give it to his ruler.<sup>81</sup>

Aggressive warfare, then, is like a medicine that works only four or five times out of ten thousand.

Someone might acknowledge that aggressive warfare is seldom successful but argue that this is because most of those who practice it lack the cleverness required to recognize when it *will* be successful and the skill to carry it out. A sufficiently talented military strategist could – and in all likelihood would – prove successful at aggressive warfare. The Mohists address this objection by citing the example of two talented military strategists who were successful in the short run but eventually fell to ruin.<sup>82</sup> But how do these examples respond to the objection? Wouldn’t the objector simply say, “They made mistakes. I will learn from their mistakes and not make them. Besides, there clearly have been cases in which aggressive warfare *has* been successful.”

The Mohists do not explicitly address this point. However, I think their response would be that the success of aggressive warfare depends on so many variables that we are never in a position to judge with confidence that it will be successful. Aggressive warfare (to use a modern analogy)

<sup>80</sup> *Mozi* 18, “A Condemnation of Aggressive Warfare.” Translation by Mei, *Motse*, p. 103. A similar line of argument may be found in *Mozi* 19.

<sup>81</sup> *Mozi* 18, “A Condemnation of Aggressive Warfare.” Cf. Mei, *Motse*, pp. 103–4.

<sup>82</sup> *Mozi* 18, “A Condemnation of Aggressive Warfare.” Cf. Mei, *Motse*, pp. 104–6.

is like a lottery with an extremely high buy-in cost, a comparatively low payout, and a miniscule probability of winning.

But how can the Mohists hold that aggressive warfare is never justified yet also argue that defensive warfare and punitive warfare *are* justified? Intuitively, someone engaging in defensive warfare is acting in a righteous manner. However, for the Mohists, righteousness and impartial benefit have to point toward the same result. How can it be impossible to say with confidence that aggressive warfare is beneficial (even just narrowly beneficial to the aggressor, since this is the kind of possibility the Mohists are rejecting), but certain that defensive warfare is impartially beneficial? Presumably, the Mohists must admit that in some circumstances it is better to surrender. Suppose the cost of resistance is high (likely to involve many casualties and considerable loss of wealth) and the effort is unlikely to be effective. Wouldn't the Mohist ruler surrender?

Here we have found a case in which the Mohist position makes more sense if they are rule-consequentialists. In other words, perhaps they think we should determine what *rules* would maximize wealth, populousness, and social order if we followed them, and then act in accordance with those rules, even in individual cases where following the rules leads us to perform an action that does not maximize good consequences. One might plausibly argue that if everyone followed the rule, "Engage in defensive warfare when attacked," it would have good consequences, even if this involved fighting when there is little chance of mounting a successful defense, because the general policy of states defending themselves would discourage aggressive warfare. And certainly we would have a much better world than we do now if everyone followed the rule, "Do not engage in aggressive warfare."

Understanding the Mohist view of "righteous warfare" as based on rule-consequentialism is intriguing, but it involves so much speculation that I am not comfortable raising it as more than a possibility.

In any case, the Mohists clearly want to justify one other type of warfare besides defensive. In "Impartial Caring," after quoting King Yu saying that "the ruler of the Miao is ever more unreasonable and deserves Heaven's punishment," the Mohists glowingly comment,

This shows that the reason Yu launched a campaign to rectify the rulers of the Miao was not because he wanted to increase his wealth and honor, earn for himself additional favors and blessings, or because it pleased his eyes and ears, but rather because he wanted to contribute to the benefit of the world and eliminate what is harmful to it. Such was the impartiality of Yu.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>83</sup> *Mozi* 16, "Impartial Caring," *Readings*, p. 73.



The Mohists refer to what King Yu did as a “punitive war” (zhū 誅). So the Mohists are against aggressive warfare (gōng 攻), waged because a ruler wants to benefit himself or his state at the expense of others. But they sanction punitive war, which is waged to maximize the wealth, populousness, and order of the world as a whole.

As Benjamin Wong and Hui Chieh Loy have observed, this is a dangerous concession: “By introducing them to the distinction between punishing and offensive war, and by suggesting that punishing wars are both righteous and profitable, he practically teaches the princes to characterize their military actions as [punitive] wars.”<sup>84</sup> It is tempting to offer the following response on behalf of the Mohists. One can always claim that an aggressive war is a punitive war, but that doesn’t change the fact that there is an important difference: a punitive war actually benefits the world impartially, whereas an aggressive war does not. However, this move is more problematic for the Mohists than it seems at first. Recall what the Mohists said to rulers who are unconcerned with whether aggressive wars are righteous and are concerned only with whether they are beneficial for them or for their own state. The Mohists said that, no matter how clever one is, one cannot be sure whether an aggressive war will be beneficial for oneself. But now they seem to be saying that one *can* determine whether a war will be beneficial for the whole world. In other words, the Mohist response to the unscrupulous rulers who regard aggressive war as profitable assumes a limitation of human cognitive capacity. But their distinction between aggressive and punitive warfare depends on transcending that same limitation. It looks like the Mohists are saying that we both can and cannot determine the likely consequences of waging any given war.

Wong and Loy are correct, again, in pointing out that the Mohist solution to this problem is “theological” (in a broad sense of the term). It is not humans who determine whether a punitive war is justified, it is Heaven:

Anciently, the three Miao tribes were in great confusion. Heaven ordered their destruction. The sun rose at night. It rained blood for three days. Dragons emerged in the temple and dogs cried in the market place. Ice came in summer and earth cracked until water gushed forth. . . . Yu held the imperial jade [tablet] in hand and set forth to conquer Miao. . . . The general of Miao was brought down by an arrow, and the Miao army was set in great confusion. . . . So there was peace in the world. This was the reason why Yu made war on the Miao.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>84</sup> Wong and Loy, “War and Ghosts in Mozi’s Political Philosophy,” p. 347.

<sup>85</sup> *Mozi* 19, “A Condemnation of Aggressive Warfare.” Translation by Mei, *Motse*, pp. 111–12.

This is followed by a similarly extravagant account of the supernatural events surrounding King Wu's decision to overthrow Tyrant Zhou. In the light of this, the ruler of a state can hardly make a casual claim to have received Heavenly sanction for a "punitive" war, as opposed to an "aggressive" war.

I quibble with Wong and Loy on one point, though. We are in agreement that the Mohists really believe in the existence of ghosts and spirits. However, they add that

Mozi ultimately does not attempt a *proof* that ghosts exist. He even intimates that there will be no *rational proof* of the matter either way. Strictly speaking, the conclusion that there will be no *rational and complete resolution* to all the problems of the world is thus deducible from Mozi's premises.<sup>86</sup>

My concern is with the word "proof." What *is* a proof? On one conception, a proof is an argument that moves from premises that we perceive to be necessarily true, through strict deductive reasoning, to a conclusion that has been established with absolute certainty. Enlightenment-era philosophers like Descartes made this a paradigm of philosophical methodology. However, Cartesianism is dead. We now know that, outside of formal logic and mathematics, nothing is "proven" in this sense. All we have in the humanistic disciplines (including philosophy), the social sciences (including those with pretensions to be "sciences"), and the experimental natural sciences are arguments that are more or less persuasive – not "proofs." Even the conclusion of a deductive argument is no more certain than its weakest premise. This may seem surprising to nonphilosophers, but the notion that fallibilism infects everything is a commonplace of contemporary epistemology.

Wong and Loy's reading of the Mohists depends on distinguishing between a "proof" and an argument that is merely rationally persuasive. They think that the Mohists did not "prove" the existence of ghosts and spirits, that they were aware of this, and that they regarded it as a limitation of their own philosophical project. But no one in ancient China distinguished between "proof" and other less rigorous forms of argumentation. There was simply "argumentation" (biàn 辯). So, it is true that the Mohists did not "prove" that ghosts and spirits exist, but "proof" was not a standard that they aspired too. (All the better for them, since "proof" is a mirage!) They *did* aspire to produce good and convincing arguments. And, as we saw, there is every reason to think that,

<sup>86</sup> Wong and Loy, "War and Ghosts in Mozi's Political Philosophy," p. 356. Emphasis mine.

by their standards, they had argued well for the existence of ghosts and spirits.

The Mohist philosophy would be impressive even if it included only what we have discussed so far. But we have not yet touched on what is perhaps the most interesting, distinctive, and ingeniously defended aspect of the Mohist position.

## V. IMPARTIAL CARING

### V.A. Introduction

As I noted in Chapter 2, §II.A.2, one of the doctrines that has been characteristic of Ruism throughout its history is a sort of agent-relative obligation that is often called “graded love.” In opposition to the Ruists, Mozi advocated *jiān ài* 兼愛, a phrase often translated as “universal love” but which I shall render as “impartial caring.” The doctrine of impartial caring states that one should have equal concern for, and has equal ethical obligations toward, promoting the well-being of every person, regardless of any special relation a person might have with oneself. It is, thus, an agent-*neutral* obligation.

The essay “Impartial Caring,” in which the followers of Mozi present and defend their master’s doctrine, seems to polarize the opinions of interpreters. On the one hand, David Wong, before offering a thoughtful defense of Ruism, dismisses most of the arguments in “Impartial Caring” as “genuinely shallow and unimportant. They are wishes masquerading as arguments.”<sup>87</sup> At the other extreme, Chad Hansen states that the Mohists offer “a nonquestion begging [*sic*] argument for universal concern” and demonstrate that the Ruist view of partial or graded love is “self-defeating.”<sup>88</sup> I agree with parts of both Wong’s and Hansen’s assessments. Ultimately, I agree with Wong in favoring some version of Ruist graded love over Mohist impartiality. However, like Hansen, I find the Mohist arguments stronger and more intriguing than Wong’s quick dismissal suggests. For example, in “Impartial Caring,” the Mohists give what is probably the first use of “thought experiments” in Chinese philosophy, and perhaps their first use in the world. Given the intrinsic interest of the Mohist thesis and their arguments for it, it is surprising that, although many works present a quick overview of the arguments in the essay, there

<sup>87</sup> Wong, “Universalism vs. Love with Distinctions,” p. 263.

<sup>88</sup> Hansen, *Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, p. 112.

are few detailed analyses of it.<sup>89</sup> I hope to partially remedy that lack in this section.

### V.B. The Caretaker Argument

One of the key arguments in “Impartial Caring” is the following *gedanken-experiment*:

Suppose one must put on one’s armor and helmet and go to war in a vast and open wilderness where life and death are uncertain; or suppose one was sent by one’s ruler or high minister to the distant states of Ba, Yue, Qi or Jing and could not be sure of either reaching them or ever returning from one’s mission. Under such conditions of uncertainty, to whom would one entrust the well-being of one’s parents, wife and children? Would one prefer that they be in the care of an impartial person or would one prefer that they be in the care of a partial person? I believe that under such circumstances, there are no fools in all the world. Even though one may not advocate impartiality, one would certainly want to entrust one’s family to the person who is impartial. But this is to condemn impartiality in word but prefer it in deed, with the result that one’s actions do not accord with what one says. And so I don’t see what reason any person in the world who has heard about impartiality can give for condemning it.<sup>90</sup>

The key question in this passage is “Would one prefer that [one’s family] be in the care of an impartial person or would one prefer that they be in the care of a partial person?” The Mohists apparently regard it as blindly obvious that one would entrust one’s family to an *impartial* person, for they do not even bother to explain why this is the best choice. But, in fact, it is far from obvious that the impartial person is the right choice. Suppose that you have gone on a dangerous mission and have entrusted the care of your family to someone else. Let us call this other person “the caretaker.”<sup>91</sup> Now consider the following elaboration of the Mohist example. Suppose that, in the community in which you left your family,

<sup>89</sup>For example, Schwartz, *World of Thought in Ancient China*, pp. 145–51, *passim*; Graham, *Disputers*, pp. 41–43.

<sup>90</sup>Mozi 16, “Impartial Caring,” *Readings*, p. 70.

<sup>91</sup>The Mohist argument discusses what sort of “caretaker” one should choose. But what about the person who entrusts his family to the “caretaker”? What Way does he follow? Is he a Ruist, “Yangist” (see later in this section), or Mohist? If he is already a Mohist, he does not need convincing. If he is a Yangist, why is he concerned for his own family? Whether he is a Yangist or a Ruist, it seems that the argument is intended to show that his beliefs are internally inconsistent (or that his beliefs are inconsistent with his actions) and thus that he should abandon some of them (in particular, the condemnation of impartiality). However, if the argument is successful in converting one to Mohist impartialism, one will lose the original motivation (partial concern for one’s own family) that the argument assumes. (I am indebted to Franklin Perkins for bringing up this point.)

a famine occurred, leading to widespread starvation. If the caretaker is an impartialist, he will have no reason to promote the health and survival of your family over the health and survival of anyone else. Indeed, if the members of your family are unlikely to survive, the impartialist caretaker may intentionally divert resources *away* from your family to families whose members have a greater chance of survival. I doubt that, if I had entrusted them to an impartialist caretaker in such a situation, the members of my family would say, "Gee, *thanks* dad!"

In contrast, if the partialist caretaker is bound to you by a special relationship such as kinship or friendship, then he will promote the well-being of your family *over* the well-being of strangers. Thus, in many situations, the Ruist caretaker is a better choice than the impartial caretaker. Even Hansen seems to admit as much: "The Confucian soldier may protect his family *better* by putting them with a relative. Even though they *come after* the original family, they still *come before* starving strangers."<sup>92</sup>

However, if the caretaker acts according to Ruist graded love, he will prefer the well-being of his own closest family members to the well-being of the members of your family. Consequently, if it is a choice between letting your family starve and letting his own family starve, a partialist caretaker will let your family starve. Consequently, one can construct convoluted stories about situations in which one's family is better off with an impartial caretaker. Suppose that the three members of your family and the three members of the caretaker's family are isolated in a cabin, with all the nearby roads snowed-in, and suppose there is only enough food to keep three people alive. Since the impartialist caretaker is completely impartial, he is as likely to give food to members of your family as he is to give food to members of his own family. So in this situation you are better off with the impartialist. However, it is worth pointing out that this is a scenario that is seldom realized. Although I do not think this claim (or its denial) can be proven with mathematical certainty, I would hazard to guess that one's family is better off in most situations with a Ruist caretaker.

So why do the Mohists regard the thought experiment as so obviously favoring the impartialist caretaker? The answer can be found in some curious comments that occur in the text immediately prior to the thought experiment:

Suppose there were two people: one who maintains partiality and one who maintains impartiality. And so the person who maintains partiality would

<sup>92</sup> Hansen, *Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, p. 112. Emphasis in original.

say, “How can I possibly regard the well-being of my friends as I do my own well-being? How can I possibly regard the parents of my friends as I do my own parents?” And so when his friends are hungry, the partial person does not feed them. When his friends are cold, he does not clothe them. When his friends are ill, he does not nurture them. And when his friends die, he does not bury them. This is what the partial person says and what he does. But this is not what the impartial person says nor is this how he acts. The impartial person says, “I have heard that in order to be a superior person in the world, one must regard the well-being of one’s friends as one regards one’s own well-being; one must regard the parents of one’s friends as one regards one’s own parents. Only in this way can one be a superior person.” And so when the impartial person’s friends are hungry, he feeds them. When his friends are cold, he clothes them. When his friends are ill, he nurtures them. And when his friends die, he buries them. This is what the impartial person says and what he does.<sup>93</sup>

An aspect of the characterization of the impartialist here is surprising: he is described as regarding the well-being of his *friends* as he regards his own well-being. And the Chinese “yǒu 友,” like the English term “friend,” suggests someone with whom one has a special relationship, not shared with people in general. If the Mohist impartialist is someone who is impartial only among the members of the group consisting of his own family and friends, but promotes the well-being of his family and friends over that of strangers, then of course one would choose an impartialist caretaker over a partialist one. But the Mohists are clearly arguing in the essay for impartiality toward humans in general, not toward the members of one’s family, or clique, or city, or kingdom. So it seems likely that the Mohists are using the term “friend” in some extended, nonstandard sense. (But they should have alerted us to this fact.) Let us assume, then, that the impartialist is someone who is “friends” with everyone and cares for everyone else as he cares for himself.

More problematic for the Mohist argument is their characterization of the partialist. It is clear that, characterized in the way that they have, and if *these* are one’s only choices, one should choose an impartialist caretaker over a partialist caretaker – because the partialist “caretaker” won’t do any caretaking at all! As described in the preceding passage, the partialist will do nothing at all to benefit or assist his friend (and, presumably, nothing for his friend’s family). So the addition of this characterization of the partialist saves the Mohist argument from being a simple non sequitur.

<sup>93</sup> Mozi 16, “Impartial Caring,” *Readings*, pp. 69–70.

However, there are now at least two different problems for the Mohist argument.

(i) First, suppose for the moment that the Mohist thought experiment is rationally persuasive. What has it persuaded us of? The most the Mohist argument would show is that we have reason to prefer impartialist caretakers for our family. Perhaps we might even be able to generalize the Mohist argument to demonstrate that we should prefer that everyone else in our community be an impartialist. But notice that this does *not* demonstrate to the partialist that he should be an impartialist. The fact (if it is a fact) that the partialist has reason to want *other* individuals or families to be *impartial* does not show that the partialist has any reason to want *himself* or *his family* to be impartial.

Hansen offers a response to this sort of objection, suggesting that a dào 道, “Way,” is intrinsically social rather than individual, so that the question the Mohists (and all other early Chinese thinkers) are concerned with is, “What *dao*-type should society teach to all people?”<sup>94</sup> This seems false as a generalization about early Chinese thought. For example, Han Feizi clearly thinks that the Way of a ruler is in tension with the Way of a minister: each wishes to manipulate the other.<sup>95</sup> Since Han can conceptualize this possibility, why couldn’t a critic of the Mohists conceptualize the possibility that the Ways of individuals are in tension with one another? However, let us assume (for the sake of the argument) that Hansen is right. Suppose that, for the Mohists, the only conceivable kind of *dao* is one that tells everyone to aim at the same goals. In other words, suppose that the Mohists cannot conceive of a *dao* that would instruct *me* to do one thing myself but would encourage *others* to do something else. If this were the case, it would not be open to someone to follow a *dao* according to which he was partial toward his own family but encouraged others to be impartially concerned with everyone. Consequently, the only available options would be the way of partiality for society as a whole (everyone acting partially) or the way of impartiality for society as a whole (everyone acting impartially).

The Mohist argument is still problematic, though. It is true that people who have to entrust their families to the care of others would be much worse off in a society composed entirely of partialists. But it is also true that those who are less crafty, weaker, less aggressive, and generally more

<sup>94</sup> Hansen, *Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, p. 113.

<sup>95</sup> Compare *Han Feizi*, Chapter 5, “The Way of a Ruler,” and Chapter 12, “The Difficulties of Persuasion.”

in need of the assistance of others would fare worse in a partialist society. Neither of these facts, by itself, demonstrates the conclusion that the Mohists want to demonstrate: that one would be a “fool” to choose to live in a partialist society. All the argument shows is that I should not prefer a partialist society unless I am crafty, strong, aggressive, and unlikely to need the assistance of others.<sup>96</sup>

(ii) The second problem with the Mohist argument becomes clear when we ask whom the argument is directed against. We have been assuming so far in our discussion (as Wong, Hansen, and all other interpreters I know of assume) that the critical arguments in “Impartial Caring” are directed against the Ruist position. The difficulty is that partialism, as the Mohists characterize it here, is nothing at all like the Ruist position.<sup>97</sup> Nowhere do any Ruists advocate complete indifference to the well-being of other human beings, and they certainly do not advocate indifference to the suffering of their friends. As Wong observes, “Confucianism has some universalistic tendencies. . . . It holds to a thesis of ‘differential [ethical] pull’ in such a way that everyone has at least some substantial pull as reflected in the idea that certain things are owed to all.”<sup>98</sup> This makes it seem like the Mohists are simply attacking a straw man.

Now the principles of charity and humanity encourage us to look for a different reading if the one we currently have attributes foolishness to the object of our interpretation. The only way to avoid attributing to the Mohists a straw-man argument is to identify someone or some group who seriously advocated the position they are attacking. It is possible that the partialists under attack are members of a loose group sometimes described as “self-preservationists.” This was not an organized movement, but rather a trend among some early Chinese thinkers. The paradigmatic self-preservationist was Yang Zhu. I discuss Yang Zhu in more detail in Chapter 4, §I, but I shall anticipate a bit of that discussion in order to explain what the Mohists may be responding to. (I will sometimes use the label “Yangist” to refer to self-preservationists like Yang Zhu, but I use it only as a loose label – like “conservative” or “liberal” – rather than to refer to an organized movement like Ruism or Mohism.)

In characterizing the differences between Yang Zhu and Mozi, Mengzi said, “Yangzi chose egoism. If plucking out one hair from his body would

<sup>96</sup> Hansen nonetheless finds the Mohist argument persuasive, for reasons that I discuss in the Appendix to this book, §II.

<sup>97</sup> Shun, *Mencius*, p. 240n51.

<sup>98</sup> Wong, “Universalism vs. Love with Distinctions,” p. 253.



have benefitted the whole world, he would not do it. Mozi loved universally. If scraping himself bare from head to heels would benefit the whole world, he would do it" (*Mengzi* 7A26). Mengzi also claims that, in his era at least, "the doctrines of Yang Zhu and Mo Di fill the world" (*Mengzi* 3B9.9). Consequently, Yang Zhu was thought by some people to advocate a view similar to that of the extreme partialist described by the Mohists, and there was a time when the thought of Yang Zhu was a major (perhaps *the* major) intellectual rival to Mohism. In addition, in the next argument of the Mohist essay ("the ruler argument," discussed in §V.C), there is a significant phrase attributed to a partialist ruler: "How brief is the span of a person's life upon this earth! It rushes by like a galloping team of horses glimpsed through a crack!" A very close simile is used in the "Robber Zhi" chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, which Angus Graham has argued is "Yangist" in origin: it says that the passing of a man's life "is as sudden as a thoroughbred steed galloping past a chink in the wall."<sup>99</sup> Furthermore, in the *Liezi* 列子 (ca. C.E. 300), there is a philosophical dialogue between Yang Zhu, one of Yang Zhu's disciples, and a disciple of Mozi's. Although the *Liezi* as a whole dates from long after the supposed time of this dialogue, Graham thinks the Mohist-Yangist dialogue in it comes from an earlier source. If Graham is correct, the *Liezi* dialogue shows that the Mohists felt a need to respond to "Yangist" arguments.<sup>100</sup>

On the other hand, there are several problems with an interpretation that identifies the target of the first (and second) Mohist arguments with a "Yangist" partialist. (1) Yang Zhu lived after the time of Mozi. (2) Although Mengzi accuses him of extreme egoism, more recent scholars read Yang Zhu as having a much more moderate position toward helping others, which might allow for some concern for others. For example, Graham writes, in discussing the Mohists, that "one has the impression that Chinese thinkers perceive persons as inherently social beings who are more or less selfish rather than as isolated individuals who will be pure egoists unless taught morality."<sup>101</sup> (3) Within "the caretaker argument" itself, the partialist is described as having some concern for his own family.<sup>102</sup> (4) As we shall see, there is an argument later in the essay

<sup>99</sup> Graham, *Disputers*, p. 64.

<sup>100</sup> Graham, *Disputers*, pp. 60–61. I quote this piece of dialogue and more of the "Robber Zhi" story in Chapter 4, §I.

<sup>101</sup> Graham, *Disputers*, p. 61.

<sup>102</sup> In the initial description of the partialist, he asks the rhetorical question, "How can I possibly regard the parents of my friends as I do my own parents?" In addition, in the "caretaker thought experiment," the person leaving on the mission is concerned with

that assumes the opponents of impartial caring do have a commitment to “filial piety” (xiào 孝). This seems to rule out their being narrow egoists.

However, all of these objections can be answered. Against (1): We do not know when the third version of “Impartial Caring” was composed; it may be a version of that essay, written later than the time of Mozi himself, as a response to Yang Zhu’s ideas specifically. Against (2): Even if Mengzi misunderstood Yang Zhu’s teachings, the fact that he did so shows that this was a misunderstanding they were open to. Perhaps the Mohists made the same interpretive error. (To attribute to them a misunderstanding apparently common in their culture is not a violation of the principles of charity or humanity.) Against (2) and (3): Perhaps the “Yangists” were not pure egoists and did have some concern for their immediate family. If this is true (and if the Mohists knew this), it would explain why they describe the partialists as having such concern. Finally, against (4): Note that the people concerned with filial piety later in the essay are never explicitly identified as “partialists.” It may be that the arguments in the first part of the essay are directed against “Yangist” partialists, whereas “the filial piety argument” later in the essay (discussed in §V.E) is directed against Ruists.

I am still not certain that the Mohists were thinking of “Yangists” (rather than Ruists) in their characterization of the partialists. But I do want to suggest it as an intriguing possibility. If we do take the caretaker argument to be directed against egoistic “Yangists,” this raises the question of how similar the Mohist “refutation” is to some of the standard Western arguments against ethical egoism. Ethical egoism is “the position that a person ought, all things considered, to do an action if and only if that action is in his overall self-interest.”<sup>103</sup> A number of recent Western philosophers have argued that ethical egoism is logically contradictory or is inconsistent in some other way.<sup>104</sup> There are important differences among the various formulations of this line of argument, but the following is typical. Egoism entails that I ought to do what is in my own overall self-interest, and that you ought to do what is in your own overall self-interest. But suppose there is an action you could perform that would

the well-being of his wife, parents, and children (however, the person leaving on the mission is not explicitly said to be a partialist as the passage defines that term).

<sup>103</sup> Kalin, “Two Kinds of Moral Reasoning,” p. 323.

<sup>104</sup> See, for example, Frankena, *Ethics*, pp. 16–18; Medlin, “Ultimate Principles and Ethical Egoism”; and Campbell, “Short Refutation of Ethical Egoism.” For responses to these arguments, see Kalin, “In Defense of Egoism,” and Kalin, “Two Kinds of Moral Reasoning.”

injure you (at least slightly), but benefit me. Since ethical egoism applies to everyone, I must acknowledge that you ought to do what is in your own interest, and you *ought not* perform the action that would injure you but benefit me. However, it also seems that, since I value my own self-interest, I must think that what ought to happen is for you to perform the action that would benefit me. Consequently, it looks like egoism entails that you both ought and ought not perform the action in question.

Jesse Kalin has provided a clear way of seeing where the logical error in this argument lies.<sup>105</sup> There is an important difference between statements of the form, “You ought to do such-and-such” and “Such-and-such ought to be done (and you happen to be the one who can do it).” Statements of the latter form imply that there are some things that are impersonally valuable. But egoism denies precisely this. Consequently, the egoist will simply reject the inference from “I value my own self-interest” to “What ought to happen is for you to perform the action that would benefit me.”

Is the Mohist argument of the form that Kalin dissects? I think that it is not. Contemporary critics of ethical egoism think that they spot a logical contradiction among the imperatives that egoism entails. (In Parfit’s argument, discussed in the Appendix, §II, there is a practical contradiction between the aims that egoism attempts to achieve and those it actually succeeds in producing if it is faithfully followed.) In contrast, in the Mohist argument, the contradiction is between the partialist’s “words” and “deeds”: “Even though one may not advocate impartiality, one would certainly want to entrust one’s family to the person who is impartial. But this is to condemn impartiality in word but prefer it in deed, with the result that one’s actions do not accord with what one says.”<sup>106</sup>

Let me review where we have been so far. Our initial examination of the Mohist thought experiment suggested that it was a simple non sequitur. At first glance, a Ruist who is bound to you by friendship seems to generally be a better choice for a caretaker than someone who is completely impartial. But then we noticed that the Mohists provide a description of the partialist in the immediately preceding paragraph of the text. Assuming the Mohist characterizations of the partialist and the impartialists, and assuming that these two are our only choices, the Mohist argument becomes logically valid. However, the partialism thus described seems completely inconsistent with any plausible understanding of Ruism. That

<sup>105</sup> Kalin, “Two Kinds of Moral Reasoning,” pp. 341–44.

<sup>106</sup> Mozi 16, “Impartial Caring,” *Readings*, p. 70.

makes it seem like the Mohist argument, although technically valid, is a straw-man argument. The only alternative to attributing a straw-man argument to the Mohists seems to be identifying the partialist with a “Yangist.”

Having reviewed, we are now in a position to see two additional problems with the Mohist argument. First, if the partialist is a self-preservationist, a Hobbesian might argue that, under certain conditions, a partialist caretaker might be a better choice.<sup>107</sup> Suppose, for example, that you are potentially more dangerous to the caretaker than he is to you, and you have a known willingness to act on your threats. You can then put your family in the care of a partialist, and tell him that, if you return and find that he has not taken good care of your family, you will kill him. As long as the partialist does not know for certain that you are dead, he will have an incentive to take care of your family. Furthermore, he will have a commitment to taking care of your family *over* the families of others, so he is arguably a better choice than an impartialist caretaker. Even if you do die, a Hobbesian will argue that it may be in the interest of a partialist caretaker to go through with his commitment to caring for your family, since he may benefit from acquiring the reputation of one who is reliable in carrying out his agreements. Overall, I am not convinced by the Hobbesian arguments myself. But the Hobbesian alternative does show that there is much more complexity to the choice situation than the Mohists suggest. And this shows that, even if one accepts the premises of the Mohist argument, their conclusion will not follow without additional arguments (which have not been supplied by the Mohists).

The second problem with the Mohist argument is more serious and has to do with a crucial implicit premise: the Mohists assume that impartiality and partiality (as defined) are the only two alternatives. But this is a false dichotomy. There are an almost infinite number of theoretical alternatives to impartiality and partiality as defined by the Mohists, and (more important) there is at least one *prima facie* plausible alternative that the Mohists would have been aware of and should have taken into account: Ruist graded love. A Ruist is almost certainly a better caretaker than an extreme egoist. Furthermore, as we saw above, a strong case can be made that a Ruist is generally preferable to a Mohist impartialist as a caretaker. In other words, the number of “live options” for our choice of a type of caretaker is larger than the Mohists suggest. Our practical choice

<sup>107</sup> Although, historically, the Mohists were not aware of Hobbes’s philosophy, we can ask, philosophically, whether they would have a response to this objection.

is actually among an impartial caretaker, a caretaker who is a “Yangist,” and a Ruist caretaker. And it is not obvious that the impartial caretaker is the best choice. In fact, a plausible case can be made that the Ruist caretaker is the best choice.

I can think of only one way to save the Mohists from this objection. It is possible that the Mohists thought it was only necessary in this section of the essay to show the superiority of Mohist impartialism to “Yangist” partialism, because they provide an argument later in the essay (the “filial piety argument”) that attempts to show that Ruists should become Mohist impartialists. If this is what the Mohists have in mind, the success of the caretaker argument ultimately depends on the success of the filial piety argument (§V.E.).

In short, there are three positions that may be under discussion in the caretaker argument: Mohism, “Yangist” partialism, and Ruist partialism. If the caretaker argument is intended to show that Mohism is preferable to Ruism, then the argument is attacking a straw man. Ruists do not advocate the actions attributed to the partialist caretaker in the argument. On the other hand, if the caretaker in the argument is a “Yangist,” then the argument presents a false dichotomy. Even if it is true that a Mohist caretaker is preferable to a “Yangist” caretaker, this does not entail that one would choose a Mohist caretaker, since there is a third possibility: the Ruist caretaker. However, it may be that the caretaker argument is intended to explain only why one should be a Mohist instead of a “Yangist,” and that the later filial piety argument is a necessary supplement to it, explaining why one should be a Mohist rather than a Ruist.

### V.C. The Ruler Argument

In response to the objection that impartiality cannot be used as a standard in selecting a ruler, the Mohists ask us to imagine a partialist and an impartialist ruler: “when his subjects are hungry, the partial ruler does not feed them. When his subjects are cold, he does not clothe them. When his subjects are ill, he does not nurture them. And when his subjects die, he does not bury them.” In contrast, the impartial ruler does for his subjects all the things the partial ruler fails to do. The Mohists then ask us to consider the following: “Suppose there were a terrible epidemic in which most of the people suffered bitterly from hunger and cold and many lay dead and unburied in the ditches and gullies. . . . I believe that under such circumstances, there are no fools in all the world. Even

though one may not advocate impartiality, one would certainly want to follow the ruler who is impartial.”<sup>108</sup>

Once again, we are faced with either a straw-man argument or a false dichotomy. Ruists certainly do not present as their ideal a ruler who ignores the needs of his subjects. So a Ruist ruler is not like the partialist described in this passage. If, in contrast, the partialist ruler is supposed to be a “Yangist,” then the Mohists are failing to examine the possible benefits of a Ruist ruler. In fact, the actions the Mohists attribute to the impartialist ruler in this passage are indistinguishable from the actions of a Ruist ruler in the same circumstances, so it is not at all clear why the subjects are better off with an impartialist ruler.

A Ruist could also point out that there are some circumstances in which subjects would be *better off* with a Ruist king. Suppose there is an international situation in which a particular policy would benefit a larger number of subjects of other states, but at a great cost to the smaller number of subjects in the ruler’s own state. Depending on the relative benefits and costs, an impartial ruler would sacrifice the well-being of his own subjects for the greater good, whereas a Ruist ruler would protect the interests of his own subjects.

There are some circumstances (not discussed by the Mohists) in which the actions of a Ruist ruler might lead to ethical dilemmas because of the agent-relative obligations the Ruist has to his own kin. In the early Ruist tradition, these dilemmas are discussed at length by Mengzi. In one case, he is asked,

“When Sage King Shun was Son of Heaven, and Gao Yao was his Minister of Crime, if ‘the Blind Man’ [i.e., Shun’s father] had murdered someone, what would they have done?”

Mengzi said, “Gao Yao would simply have arrested him!”

“So Shun would not have forbidden it?”

Mengzi said, “How could Shun have forbidden it? Gao Yao had a sanction for his actions.”

“So what would Shun have done?”

Mengzi said, “Shun looked at casting aside the whole world like casting aside a worn sandal. He would have secretly carried him on his back and fled, to live along the coast, happy to the end of his days, joyfully forgetting the world.” (7A35)

In Mengzi’s solution to the ethical dilemma, Shun manages to avoid violating either his obligations as king or his obligations as a son. This

<sup>108</sup> Mozi 16, “Impartial Caring,” *Readings*, p. 71.

is ingenious, but, arguably, Shun's subjects would be better off if Shun were to remain as ruler and simply allow his father to be arrested (and executed).

To my knowledge, the Ruists never directly respond to this objection. (But then again, the Mohists never directly raise it.) I think there is a Ruist response, though. They might acknowledge that, in theory, a purely impartial ruler would be better for his subjects than a Ruist ruler in certain rare cases. However, they might argue that the caring yet impartial Mohist ruler is, at best, extremely rare, because a human who is sufficiently indifferent to the suffering of his own father to allow him to be executed is, as a matter of psychological fact, unlikely to be sufficiently compassionate to be a good ruler. (And if the ideal Mohist ruler is extremely rare, then the Mohist political system is intrinsically unstable in real-world conditions.) As an armchair psychologist, I find this Ruist argument plausible (but it is based on an empirical psychological claim, which should be supported by further evidence).

The Ruist position I just sketched relies on two separate claims: (1) love of one's parents is a necessary psychological prerequisite for loving others, and (2) this love is fundamentally inconsistent with impartial caring. Interestingly, Mengzi has an argument with a Mohist, Yi Zhi, who could be seen as pulling these two claims apart, accepting the first, but rejecting the second. We will look at Yi Zhi's position in Chapter 4, §VI.B.

#### V.D. The Historical Precedent Argument

The Mohists next address the concern that practicing impartiality is impossible, like "picking up Mount Tai and carrying it across the" Yangtze or Yellow River. The Mohist response is to provide textual evidence from historical sources that impartiality was practiced by the sage kings of former times. If impartiality was in fact successfully practiced by earlier rulers, this is decisive evidence that practicing impartiality is possible. Once again, though, there is a problem with the Mohist argument. The Mohists cite four texts as evidence for their claim. Although the Mohists interpret each of these texts as providing evidence for their brand of impartiality, what is actually written in the first three texts is completely consistent with a Ruist conception of kingship. For example, in the third text, Sage King Tang is quoted as addressing Heaven during a drought, saying, "If those within my domain have committed any offense [which led Heaven to cause this drought], let the responsibility rest with me." The trope of a ruler offering himself as a sacrifice to save others is

ancient in China, and is as much a part of the Ruist tradition as the Mohist.<sup>109</sup>

The last text the Mohists cite does provide some evidence that something like Mohist impartiality was regarded as an ideal by earlier rulers. It is an ode, attributed to the time of the Zhou Dynasty, which says (in part), “The King’s Way is broad so broad; / without partiality or party.” However, I think a Ruist would interpret this as applying only to the king’s relationship with his subjects at large: he should be without partiality in treating his own subjects, but he (and everyone else) has more intense concern and special obligations to his own kin. (Mengzi takes a similar approach to a historical source cited as evidence by Yi Zhi.) Of course, the Ruist interpretation of this poem may be mistaken, but the ambiguity in the one piece of textual evidence that directly supports the Mohist claim shows that the Mohists have not given us much evidence for the claim that impartiality was practiced historically.

### V.E. The Filial Piety Argument

This argument is especially intriguing because it seems to take as one of its premises the sort of commitment that is definitive of Ruist graded love, but to argue from this premise to Mohist universalism:

A filial son who seeks what is beneficial for his parents . . . must want other people to care for and benefit his parents. Given this, how should one act in order to bring about such a state of affairs? Should one first care for and benefit the parents of others, expecting that they in turn will respond by caring for and benefitting one’s own parents? Or should one first dislike and steal from other people’s parents, expecting that they in turn will respond by caring for and benefitting one’s own parents?<sup>110</sup>

The Mohists appeal to the principle that “anyone who cares for others will receive care from them, whereas anyone who dislikes others will in turn be disliked.” On this basis, they conclude, “Clearly one must first care for and benefit the parents of others in order to expect that they in turn will respond by caring for and benefitting one’s own parents.”<sup>111</sup> Thus, the argument is that, if one is committed (as are Ruists) to filial piety (xiào 孝), then one should not “dislike and steal from other people’s parents,” but

<sup>109</sup> For a discussion, see Nivison, “‘Virtue’ in Bone and Bronze,” pp. 21–24.

<sup>110</sup> *Mozi* 16, “Impartial Caring,” *Readings*, pp. 74–75.

<sup>111</sup> *Mozi* 16, “Impartial Caring,” *Readings*, p. 75.



rather ought to “care for and benefit the parents of others.” Notice that, although the argument is phrased in terms of filial piety, which involves a special commitment to the well-being of one’s own parents, it could be generalized to apply to any special commitment: husband to wife, sibling to sibling, parent to child, and so forth. I shall, therefore, treat the argument in its generalized form.

The key premises of this argument strike me as quite plausible. It is not invariantly true that either kindness or callousness toward others is reciprocated. However, we do seem to find that, across a broad range of cultures and circumstances, kindness is often repaid by kindness, and callousness by callousness. Furthermore, most of us are concerned about the well-being of our parents (or about other members of our family). Consequently, it seems that we do have good reason, all else being equal, to make friends, and not enemies, of others.

The problem with the argument is that it does not seem to lead to the conclusion the Mohists are using it to establish. Recall that the Mohists are arguing against Ruists and in favor of impartiality. But their argument here, even if successful, does not provide any reason to reject Ruism, for Ruists certainly do not advocate harming the parents of others. Indeed, Ruists like Mengzi advocate “extending” compassion outward from one’s own family to others: “Treat your elders as elders, and extend it to the elders of others; treat your young ones as young ones, and extend it to the young ones of others” (1A7.12).<sup>112</sup> Furthermore, the Mohist argument does not provide any reason for impartiality: all it shows is that, if one *is* partial to one’s family, one should not harm the families of others.

Perhaps the Mohists assume that a policy of Ruist graded love, although not directly commanding us to harm the families of others, will lead to harming others. As a general claim, this is patently false. Most of us do things to benefit our families all the time without needing to harm the families of others. It is true that there are some circumstances in which adherence to graded love will require acting against the interests of other families. Suppose we are on a sinking ship, with one other family and one lifeboat left on board, and there is room for only one family in that lifeboat. In such exigent circumstances, Ruist graded love requires that I attempt to secure the lifeboat for my own family.

<sup>112</sup> That is, treat the elders and young ones of your family as they should be treated, and then extend that treatment to the young ones and elders of other families.

However, this example does not show that the Mohist “filial piety argument” provides a reason to be an impartialist. First, the Mohist argument begins from the assumption that we are committed to the well-being of our own parents (or our own family members generally). As long as we are so committed, if we find that we are in a situation like the “life boat scenario” above, we should drop our normal policy of not acting against the interests of others. To say that, in such an unusual and exigent situation, I should treat my own family members in need no differently from strangers is to deny one of the premises of the argument, which is that I want to benefit my family members. Second, situations like the “life boat scenario” are likely to be quite rare. It is not clear what practical relevance the small possibility of such situations being realized has.

#### V.F. The Practicability Argument

One common objection that has been raised against certain forms of impartial consequentialism in the West is that complete impartiality is psychologically unobtainable (for most people, at least). Consequently, it does not surprise us that the final Mohist argument in this essay is a counterargument to the objection that “impartial care is too difficult to carry out.” This might seem to be merely a repetition of the earlier objection dealt with in the “historical precedent argument.” However, the “historical precedent argument” focused on the practicability of impartiality *as a policy for kings to follow* in ruling their subjects. The “practicability argument” here responds to the objection that *most people in society* cannot be made to act in accordance with impartial caring.

The Mohist counterargument is to provide counterexamples to the objection, in the form of successful policies that seem to have required behavioral changes in people at least as drastic as the change to universal love. The examples are a ruler who “was fond of slender waists,” and whose subjects, in consequence, “ate no more than one meal a day and became so weak that they could not raise themselves up without the support of a cane nor could they walk without leaning against a wall”; a ruler who “was fond of bravery,” and whose soldiers, when so ordered, charged onto burning ships; and a ruler who “was fond of rough and simple attire,” so that his subjects “wrapped themselves in sheets of cloth, wore sheepskin jackets, hats of raw silk, and hempen shoes.” The Mohists conclude, “Curtailing one’s food, charging into flames, and wearing rough and simple attire are among the most difficult things in the world to get people to do, but masses of people did it in order to please their

superiors.” By comparison, impartial caring is easy to put into effect.<sup>113</sup> The Mohists give a more extensive list later in this section of practices that can modify behavior: superiors delighting in them, encouraging them with rewards and praise, and discouraging alternative practices with penalties and punishments.

We have insufficient historical knowledge to evaluate the Mohist accounts of these rulers and the effectiveness of their programs of behavior modification. However, our own knowledge of human practices suggests that these accounts are plausible, up to a point. For example, the widespread occurrence of eating disorders among women in our own society makes painfully vivid the possibility of a society in which many humans are motivated to become unhealthfully thin. However, what the Mohists intend to show with their examples is something much more extreme. Specifically, the Mohists are arguing in favor of a philosophical anthropology according to which the structure of human motivations and dispositions is highly malleable.<sup>114</sup> In other words, humans are like clay that can be radically remolded “within a single generation,” so long as rulers provide the appropriate leadership and behavioral incentives. If by “human nature” we mean a structure of motivations and dispositions that humans have from birth and that is difficult to alter, then we might say that the Mohists have a philosophical anthropology according to which *there is no human nature*.<sup>115</sup> (Significantly, the Chinese term for human nature, *xing* 性, does not occur even once in all of the synoptic chapters.)

Other passages suggest the same view. Recall that the opening of “Obeying One’s Superior” says that, prior to the institution of government, life is chaotic and violent because humans have wildly divergent conceptions of what is right. We noted that this is different from the conception of

<sup>113</sup> *Mozi* 16, “Impartial Caring,” *Readings*, pp. 75–76. My experience in teaching “Impartial Caring” has been that students frequently object that the examples the Mohists give are examples of rulers being cruel to their subjects rather than examples of impartial caring. This is true, but it is not an objection to the Mohist argument. The Mohists are not *endorsing* the actions of these rulers. They are using these examples only to *demonstrate the possibility* of radically altering the behavior of a population.

<sup>114</sup> To my knowledge, the only commentator to have identified this aspect of their thought is David S. Nivison. See his “Weakness of Will in Ancient Chinese Philosophy,” p. 83, and “Philosophical Voluntarism in Fourth-Century China,” p. 130.

<sup>115</sup> I should point out that the Mohist view is different from a pure Skinnerian view in that the Mohists seem to recognize something beyond punishment and reward as shaping human behavior: a tendency to follow the behavior of one’s superiors. (I am indebted to Franklin Perkins for drawing my attention to this last point.)

Thomas Hobbes, according to which the brutality of life without government is caused by the fact that humans are, by nature, purely self-interested. In other words, the Mohists hold that humans are not, by nature, purely self-interested, but also hold that there is no natural tendency for humans to converge on a particular conception of righteousness. Together, these beliefs suggest that there is no human nature at all. Consider also the passage from “For Moderation in Funerals” where the Mohists describe the ideal funeral:

A coffin three inches thick is adequate for the decaying bones. Three layers of clothes are adequate for the decaying flesh. The grave should be dug to a depth that does not strike water but that also does not allow fumes to escape to the surface. The burial mound should only be high enough to clearly mark the spot. *There should be crying as one sees the departed off and as one comes back from the grave. But as soon as people have returned to their homes, they should resume their individual livelihoods.*<sup>116</sup>

The passage is largely about the practical and hygienic requirements for graves. Tacked on at the end is a reference to the need to grieve (a little bit), and this does suggest the recognition of at least some structure to human motivations and dispositions. But overall the passage indicates that human dispositions have little innate structure to them, so that they present no impediment to humans being taught to mourn more efficiently.

Not only do the Mohists seem to be suggesting that there is minimal structure to human dispositions, but they *need* to hold something like this view, because (as I argued in Chapter 1, §II.A) graded love seems to be the “commonsense” view of many of us, not just in the contemporary United States, but in most societies around the world. Consequently, if there is such a thing as human nature, it seems to be strongly opposed to Mohist impartiality.

The Mohists’ examples of behavior modification are plausible as practices that were instituted among small portions of the population, or among large segments of the population for short periods of time. However, what the Mohists need to show is that impartial care can be permanently instituted as a practice among a segment of the general population

<sup>116</sup> *Mozi* 25, “For Moderation in Funerals,” p. 89. Emphasis mine. Immediately after the quoted passage, the Mohists add, “There should be regular sacrificial offerings made to extend filiality to one’s parents.” For Ruists, such sacrificial rituals would be occasions for reverence toward and further grieving over the departed. But, as I noted earlier (§IV.D), the Mohist descriptions of ritual activity treat it as a simple quid pro quo with the spirits, by which we win their favors.

large enough for it to be practically effective. Their examples are insufficiently detailed and (without further documentation) insufficiently convincing to show this. Indeed, the prevalence of graded love in the world, and the disastrous failures of social philosophies such as Stalinism and Maoism that have regarded human dispositions as highly malleable suggest that there *is* such a thing as human nature, and that we flout it at our peril.<sup>117</sup>

## VI. CONCLUSION

The Mohist essay on “Impartial Caring” is an impressive example of early philosophical argumentation. It shows great systematicity in its efforts to argue in favor of impartial caring, to argue against the major alternatives to impartial caring (including, if I am right, both “Yangism” and Ruism), and to address every one of the major objections to impartial caring (including the objection that impartial caring cannot be inculcated among the general population). Furthermore, the essay makes use of the classic technique of the thought experiment.

Nonetheless, I believe that the essay ultimately fails to be persuasive. The caretaker thought experiment offers a false dichotomy unless it relies on the later filial piety argument to rule out Ruist graded love as a choice for a Way. And the filial piety argument is a simple non sequitur.

I would give a similar evaluation of early Mohism overall: it is intellectually impressive and historically important but ultimately fails to convince. Of course, a philosopher may fail to convince us of the details of her position, yet still inspire us to defend and develop her key insights. Whether one finds a particular philosophical position inspiring is always a matter of judgment. But, for my own part, I do not find Mohism inspiring. Part of the problem is that Western versions of consequentialism are remarkably sophisticated, and I do not see what Mohism has to teach them. But a deeper problem is the very notion of impartial consequentialism of any form.

We must proceed carefully if we attempt to draw any comparisons between Chinese philosophers and Western philosophers. We may find, to borrow a phrase from Lee Yearley, “real but thin resemblances” that mask thick differences.<sup>118</sup> Or, after having noted one particular similarity

<sup>117</sup> I return to this issue, and cite some empirical evidence in support of my claim, in Chapter 5, §III.A.2.

<sup>118</sup> Yearley, *Mencius and Aquinas*, p. 189. See also *ibid.*, pp. 4–6, 188–96.

between a given Chinese philosopher and certain Western philosophers, we may unreflectively assume that the Chinese philosophers are similar in other respects to the Western philosophers in question. Nonetheless, I think we do see genuine and illuminating similarities between the Mohists and some versions of utilitarianism. Utilitarianism is motivated, in part, by a concern similar to that of Mohism: the desire to find an ethical standard that is clear and impersonal. And we find similar doctrines flowing from this concern: a normative view that is consequentialist, rejection of many of the practices that were traditional (in their respective societies), rejection of agent-relative restrictions, and (I would argue) impoverished conceptions of human emotions. Thomas Nagel has described utilitarianism as part of an approach (found in many fields in Western philosophy) that attempts to take “the view from nowhere” and results in a conception of the world as “centerless.”<sup>119</sup> The Mohists’ “will of Heaven” takes “the view from nowhere.” If my comparison between Mohism and utilitarianism is revealing, then Nagel’s criticisms of the latter are relevant to Mohism:

The detached, objective view takes in everything and provides a standpoint of choice from which all choosers can agree about what should happen.<sup>120</sup> But each of us is not only an objective self but a particular person with a particular perspective; we act in the world from that perspective, and not only from the point of view of a detached will, selecting and rejecting world-states.<sup>121</sup>

The fatal weakness of any impartial consequentialism is that it tries to force us to take the “view from nowhere.” It thereby ignores the validity of our particular perspectives and the value of the particular commitments and relationships that make us who we are.

So if not impartial consequentialism, what Way should we follow? Yang Zhu and Mengzi offer two alternatives to Mohism, so to them we turn in the next chapter.

<sup>119</sup> See especially Nagel, *View from Nowhere*, pp. 3–12. For the term “centerless,” see *ibid.*, pp. 56ff. Compare Putnam’s criticisms of efforts to take “a God’s Eye point of view” of the world (*Reason, Truth and History*, pp. 49ff.).

<sup>120</sup> Cf. the opening of *Mozi* 11, “Obeying One’s Superior,” *Readings*, p. 65. (This passage is quoted and discussed earlier in this chapter, §IV.B.)

<sup>121</sup> Nagel, *View from Nowhere*, p. 183.

## 4

### Mengzi

Humaneness is being a human.

– Mengzi

There is a fundamental contrast between man-as-he-happens-to-be and man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-essential-nature. Ethics is the science which is to enable men to understand how they make the transition from the former state to the latter.

– Alasdair MacIntyre

Mengzi complained that “the doctrines of Yang Zhu and Mozi fill the world! . . . Yang is ‘for oneself.’ This is to not have a ruler. Mo is ‘impartial caring.’ This is to not have a father. To not have a father and to not have a ruler is to be an animal” (3B9.9). In response to Mohist impartialism, Mengzi argues that human nature places constraints on what Way humans can and should follow. It would have seemed no more plausible to Mengzi’s contemporaries than it does to us that all of society can be made to care as much for strangers as for their own family “as easily as” soldiers can be trained to march onto burning ships to die (cf. Chapter 3, §VI.F). In appealing to human nature against the Mohists, Mengzi agrees with Yáng Zhū 楊朱. However, Mengzi argues against Yang Zhu that there is *more* to human nature than the desire for survival and physical satisfaction. Compassion for the suffering of others and disdain to do what is shameful are also parts of human nature.

So it is impossible to understand Mengzi without understanding how his work is a reaction to not only the early Mohists but also to Yang Zhu.

## I. YANG ZHU ON HUMAN NATURE

Yang Zhu, who lived around the middle of the fourth century B.C.E., was clearly not the first person in Chinese history to mention the word “xìng 性,” which we render as “nature.” However, he seems to have been the first to make it central to philosophical discussions in a way that it had not been before, and he did so in a way that provided a plausible criticism of both Ruism and Mohism.

But what was Yang Zhu’s conception of human nature? No writings reliably attributed to Yang Zhu have come down to us. Indeed, there is some reason to believe that he never wrote any work. (It has even been suggested that he is a mythical figure.) There is also no reason to believe that he had anything like a tightly organized group of disciples who continued his “movement” after his death. The term “Yangist” is (like the Western terms “conservative” or “liberal”) a sometimes useful label for a general trend of thought. Depending on which scholar you ask, we either have access to “a substantial Yangist literature” from which we can construct a coherent philosophical view, or we know nothing about Yang Zhu’s views on human nature.<sup>1</sup> The *Huainanzi* 淮南子 reports, “Keeping one’s nature intact, protecting one’s genuineness, and not letting the body be tied by other things – these Yangzi advocated but Mengzi condemned.”<sup>2</sup> Similar themes appear in a variety of early texts. So, if the similarity in themes indicates a common and coherent intellectual source, we may have good access to Yang Zhu’s own views. However, the same phrases can pop up in different works without these works representing the same earlier view. The best we can do is try to reconstruct Yang Zhu’s views based on early comments about the “nature” (xìng 性) of things in general, along with the handful of second-hand accounts we have of Yang Zhu’s views.

The *Lǚshì chūnqiū* 吕氏春秋 has the following revealing comments:

It is the nature of water to be clear. Earth disturbs it, hence it is unable to be clear. It is the nature of people to live to old age. Things disturb them, hence they are unable to live to old age. Things are that by means of which one nurtures the nature. They are not that which one nurtures with the nature.... For this reason, in relation to things that one hears, sees and

<sup>1</sup> Graham has the former, epistemologically optimistic, view (Graham, “Background of the Mencian Theory of Human Nature,” pp. 13–16; Graham, *Disputers*, pp. 53–64), whereas Robert Eno argues that there is no reason to associate Yang Zhu with any doctrine of human nature at all (Eno, *Confucian Creation of Heaven*, pp. 110, 257–58n41).

<sup>2</sup> *Huainanzi* 13. Translation slightly modified from Graham, *Disputers*, p. 54.



tastes, the sage chooses what is beneficial to one's nature, and avoids what is harmful to one's nature. This is the Way to keep one's nature intact.<sup>3</sup>

In a different section of the same work, we find:

If one climbs a mountain and looks down, oxen will look like sheep, and sheep will look like pigs. The nature of an ox is not like a sheep; the nature of a sheep is not like a pig. This [mistaken appearance] is due simply to the extremity of the perspective from which one looks.<sup>4</sup>

And in a number of works, we are told that "Nature is what is received from Heaven (tiān 天)."<sup>5</sup> Together, these passages suggest the following aspects of the concept of a thing's "nature":

- Different kinds of things have different natures.
- A thing is endowed with a nature by Heaven.
- External disturbances or injuries may damage the natural qualities of a thing.

For Kongzi, Mengzi, and the early Mohists, Heaven was regarded as ethically authoritative. Since our nature is endowed in us by Heaven, a further inference follows:

- We ought to follow our nature, cultivate it, and preserve it.

On the basis of considerable textual evidence (including some of the passages we cited above), Angus Graham concluded that, up to and including the time of Mengzi, the *xing* "of a living thing was commonly understood to be the way in which it develops and declines from birth to death when uninjured and adequately nourished, for example its

<sup>3</sup> *Lüshi chungiu, Jibu* 1.2, "The Root of Life." (A similar comment about the nature of water being disturbed by earth is found in *Huainanzi* 2.) The *Lüshi chungiu* probably dates from around 240 B.C.E., whereas the *Huainanzi* is from around 140 B.C.E. In each case, this is long after the time of Yang Zhu himself. But sometimes we have to make do with the historical sources we have. For a complete translation of the *Lüshi chungiu*, see Knoblock and Riegel, *Annals of Lü Buwei*.

<sup>4</sup> *Lüshi chungiu, Lunbu* 23.5, "Obstructions."

<sup>5</sup> *Huainanzi* 10. (Cf. *Lüshi chungiu, Jibu* 7.2, "Rattling Weapons.") *Huainanzi* 10 specifically distinguishes "nature" from what is due to *mìng* 命 (which we should evidently render "fate" in this context), because the next sentence after the passage quoted above is "Fate (*mìng* 命) is what one encounters in one's circumstances." However, other works link the nature and *mìng* 命 (which is better translated "decree" in those contexts). For example, the *Mean* famously opens with the line "The decree (*mìng* 命) of Heaven is what is meant by 'nature.'" A similar linking of nature and the decree of Heaven is found in *Xing zi ming chu* (discussed later in this section).

condition in full health and its term of life.”<sup>6</sup> This view, which I shall refer to as “the developmental view of *xing*,” seems clearly to be how Mengzi uses the term “*xing*.” Thus, he refers to the growth of trees and plants on a mountain as the nature of the mountain and describes how some factors (such as rainfall) nurture this nature, whereas others (humans cutting down trees for lumber, animals eating plants for food) injure this nature (6A8). The developmental understanding of *xing* has slightly different nuances in different contexts: “the way in which [a thing] develops and declines from birth to death when uninjured and adequately nourished”; the properties and activities that characterize a thing when it is developing or has developed along its proper course; and the “characteristic tendencies of things” when they are uninjured and adequately nourished. These senses are clearly closely related, so it is not necessary for our purposes to disentangle them.<sup>7</sup>

Graham notes that Xunzi uses *xing* in a different sense, to refer to our innate tendencies, prior to any development or cultivation. Thus, Xunzi writes, “people’s nature is such that their eyes can see, and their ears can hear. . . . Their eyes are simply keen, and their ears are simply acute; it is clear that one does not learn these things.”<sup>8</sup> I shall refer to Xunzi’s view as “the innate conception of *xing*.” So for Mengzi a paradigmatic example of a natural quality is the health of a tall tree that has grown over time from a tiny sprout with the assistance of sunlight, water, air, and good soil. But for Xunzi a paradigmatic example of a natural quality is the sight of an eye, which it has at (or soon after) birth and will continue to have unless subjected to serious trauma. This difference in how *xing* is understood leads to an interesting result: Xunzi criticizes what he takes to be Mengzi’s thick conception of *xing*, but his criticisms are not always to the point since he and Mengzi do not share a thin conception of *xing*.

Graham suggested, quite plausibly given the textual evidence available at the time, that the developmental conception of human nature was dominant up until the time of Xunzi, whose innate conception of human nature was idiosyncratic. This aspect of Graham’s interpretation has been rendered obsolete, though, by the excavation, in 1993, of some long-lost

<sup>6</sup> Graham, “Background of the Mencian Theory of Human Nature,” pp. 27–28. Similar interpretations of the Mengzian view of *xing* are defended in Ivanhoe, *Ethics in the Confucian Tradition*, pp. 37–46, and Shun, *Mencius*, Chapter 6, especially pp. 180–87.

<sup>7</sup> The three senses are discussed in Graham, “Background of the Mencian Theory of Human Nature,” pp. 27–28, *ibid.*, p. 11, and Shun, *Mencius*, p. 186 (respectively).

<sup>8</sup> Xunzi 23, “Human Nature Is Bad,” *Readings*, pp. 299–300. Cf. Xunzi 22 “On Correct Naming,” *Readings*, p. 292.

Ruist texts at Guō diàn 郭店. These texts, which probably date to around 300 B.C.E., represent a sect of Ruism clearly quite distinct from that of Mengzi. As Paul Goldin has observed, in one of the best articles on the philosophical significance of these works, “for a number of reasons, the Guodian manuscripts are among the most difficult texts yet excavated.”<sup>9</sup> So any conclusions drawn from them must be tentative. However, one of these texts, currently known as “Nature Comes from the Decree” (Xìng zì mìng chū 性自命出), seems to suggest a view of *xìng* that is more in line with the innate conception. In particular, “Nature Comes from the Decree” makes no mention of innate ethical dispositions that are the basis for ethical cultivation, and it emphasizes practice and education through classical texts as things that are necessary to “whet” (lì 厲) or “augment” (zhǎng 長) one’s nature.<sup>10</sup> This text never says explicitly that the *xìng* is only what is present from birth, as opposed to what develops later, but this seems at the very least consistent with what it does say.

It is theoretically possible that two philosophers with different conceptions of nature (one holding the innate view and one the developmental view) could simply argue at cross-purposes and fail to constructively engage each other at all. (As an analogy, if we are arguing over whether most cats have fur, and you are talking about house cats, while I am talking about a cat-o-nine-tails, we are simply talking past each other.) However, I think that, in ancient China, substantive, meaningful debate over human nature did occur, despite the fact that the participants did not always share a conception of human nature. The reason debate could continue to be significant is that the interlocutors were not talking about *completely* disjoint topics. Each side did, as a matter of fact, have views about what the other side was talking about. For example, as we shall see, Mengzi held that human nature was good, and by this he meant that humans have innate tendencies toward virtue *that will develop given a healthy environment and ethical cultivation*. Xunzi held that human nature was bad, and by this he meant that the innate dispositions *that we have prior to enculturation* are almost purely self-interested, and if humans follow them they will be led to mutual destruction. Mengzi and Xunzi already disagree to a certain extent, because Mengzi thinks we are born with virtuous inclinations that are present even prior to enculturation, whereas Xunzi denies this. However, the really substantive disagreement is over

<sup>9</sup> Goldin, “Xunzi in the Light of the Guodian manuscripts,” p. 37.

<sup>10</sup> *Guodian Chumu zhujian*, p. 179 (“Xing zi ming chu,” strips 11–12). Cf. Goldin, “Xunzi in the Light of the Guodian Manuscripts,” pp. 40–41.

ethical cultivation. Xunzi (along with the authors of *Xing zi ming chu*) did not agree with Mengzi that humans would develop virtues simply in response to a healthy environment, the way a sprout will grow into a tree given rain, sunshine, and so on. Xunzi thought that humans will develop virtues only if forced to act against and reshape their innate dispositions, like the way a straight piece of wood is forcefully bent into a wagon wheel.<sup>11</sup> So the fact that Mengzi and Xunzi have different thin conceptions of human nature does not prevent them from having a substantive disagreement, because their distinct conceptions of human nature are part of a larger framework of beliefs. We should be aware of and keep in the back of our minds the distinction between the innate and the developmental views of human nature. However, this distinction will not always be important in understanding the substantive disagreements that thinkers have over issues related to humans' innate qualities and their patterns of development.

So what *was* Yang Zhu's view on human nature? Perhaps our only contemporary source for Yang Zhu's views is Mengzi himself. He summarizes Yang Zhu's interpretation of what characterizes human nature as *wèi wǒ* 為我, which literally means "for myself," but which we might loosely render as "self-interest" or "everyone for himself." Mengzi adds, "If plucking out a single hair would benefit the whole world, he would not do it" (7A26). But Mengzi's description is open to various interpretations. Here are some possibilities, each of which has at least some textual support:

1. Yang Zhu was a hedonist, who believed in maximizing the intensity of sensual pleasures, even if this risks shortening one's life by injuring one's health.
2. Yang Zhu was a psychological egoist, who held that humans are motivated only to do what they believe to be in their own interest.
3. Yang Zhu was an ethical egoist, who held that humans *should* do only what is in their own interest.
4. Yang Zhu advocated maximizing one's bodily health and longevity.
5. Yang Zhu advocated a moderate and sustainable satisfaction of one's bodily desires.

<sup>11</sup> The contrasting views of Mengzi and Xunzi reflect the distinction between development and re-formation models of self-cultivation, as outlined in Chapter 1, §II.B.3.a. (I am, of course, simplifying many subtleties in the views of Mengzi and Xunzi here. For example, we shall see that Mengzi believes more is necessary for ethical cultivation than merely a good environment. My point is only to sketch why I think Mengzi and Xunzi have a substantive disagreement despite having different thin accounts of human nature.)

6. Yang Zhu was a sort of “self-interest utopian,” who believed that everyone’s well-being would be maximized if each pursued his or her own interest instead of trying to make the world a better place through government action.
7. Yang Zhu was a “privatist,” who held that humans should do only what is in the best interest of themselves and their immediate families.

The *Liezi* 列子 includes a chapter entitled “Yang Zhu,” which purports to present his teachings. The position we find there is a version of position 1: unrestrained hedonism. Although this seems, *prima facie*, like an implausible position, it is defended in this work with remarkable rigor and sophistication. But, as Graham has shown, the *Liezi* is a work that in all likelihood dates from around 300 C.E. Since we do not find any other sources that identify Yang Zhu with position 1, we may safely rule that out as an interpretation of his views.<sup>12</sup>

There is, though, a brief dialogue at the end of this chapter between Yang Zhu, Qin Guli (a disciple of Mozi), and Meng Sunyang (a follower of Yang Zhu) that Graham thinks may be authentically pre-Qin:

Qin Guli asked Yang Zhu, “If you could help the whole world by the loss of a hair off your body, would you do it?”

Yang Zhu replied, “The world would surely not be helped by a single hair.”  
“Supposing it did help, would you not do it?”

Yang Zhu did not answer him. Meng Sunyang said, “You have not fathomed what is in my Master’s heart. Let me say it. Suppose for a bit of your skin you could get a thousand in gold, would you give it?”

“I would.”

“Suppose that by cutting off a limb at the joint you could win a state, would you do it?”

Qin Guli was silent for a while.

Meng Sunyang continued, “That one hair matters less than skin and skin less than a limb is plain enough. However, go on adding to the one hair and it amounts to as much as skin, go on adding more skin and it amounts to as much as one limb. A single hair is certainly one thing among the myriad parts of the body, how can one treat it lightly?”<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> On the dating of the text, see Graham, *Lieh-tzu*, pp. xiii, 1, 135. For a translation of the “Yang Zhu” chapter, see *ibid.*, pp. 135–57. Even though the extreme hedonist position defended in the “Yang Zhu” essay is probably neither pre-Qin nor representative of Yang Zhu’s own thought, it is interesting enough in its own right as a philosophical essay that it deserves more careful attention than it has received.

<sup>13</sup> Translation modified from Graham, *Disputers*, pp. 60–61.

This is consistent with Mengzi's characterization of Yang Zhu in 7A26. However, the Yangist/Mohist debate and Mengzi's comment both seem consistent with any of positions 2 through 7 above.

We know that Yang Zhu formulated his position in terms of "human nature." What would it mean to say that, according to *xing* as it is understood in early Chinese thought, each of us is *wei wo* ("for ourselves")? It would have entailed that it is a deformation of human nature to act for any other purpose than benefiting oneself. This would make Yang Zhu's view closer to position 3 than position 2. Position 2, you will recall, is psychological egoism, the doctrine that the *only* motive humans *do* have is to get what is in their self-interest. Position 3 is ethical egoism, the doctrine that the only motive humans *should* have is to get what is in their self-interest. In other words, the psychological egoist denies that anyone ever has any motivations that are not purely self-interested. The ethical egoist acknowledges that humans do sometimes have motivations other than self-interest, but she claims that it is *foolish* to have such non-self-interested motivations, and similarly foolish to aim at anything other than one's own self-interest. Now, it is part of the concept of *xing* that it can be damaged or deformed. If it is human nature to aim only at one's own self-interest, what would a person be like whose nature was deformed? Presumably, a deformation in nature would lead to "unnatural" motivations, which in this case would include aiming at something other than one's own self-interest. So on the view under consideration humans *can* aim at something other than their own self-interest, but only if their nature is damaged or deformed. Thus, Yang Zhu's position is likely to have been a version of ethical egoism. In addition, Yang Zhu is more philosophically interesting if he is an ethical egoist rather than a psychological egoist, since psychological egoism is one of the few philosophical positions to have been definitively refuted, whereas ethical egoism is a live philosophical option.

Psychological egoism has a peculiar hold in contemporary Western pop philosophy, so it is perhaps worth a brief detour to explain why it is mistaken. There are two kinds of cases that falsify psychological egoism: altruistic motivations and self-destructive motivations. Mengzi's example of our feeling of "alarm and compassion" at the sight of a child about to fall into a well is, of course, directed in part against Yang Zhu (Mengzi 2A6, discussed later in §III), and it succeeds nicely in illustrating the fact that humans sometimes have concern for the well-being of others. The standard objection to examples like the preceding is that those who are motivated by altruism are acting only because *it would make them feel bad*

if others suffer. This is quite true, but it confirms, rather than falsifies, the existence of human benevolence. If a person did not care about the well-being of others, the suffering of others could not make him feel bad. That which I am genuinely indifferent toward does not motivate me either positively or negatively. However, we do not need to turn to examples of human benevolence to see why psychological egoism is mistaken. Humans seem to frequently be motivated to do things that are neither benevolent, nor in their self-interest, even according to their own judgment. To pick a banal example, someone who is trying to quit smoking but keeps failing at it is doing what she herself says is not in her best interest. In reply, students frequently note that the smoker continues to smoke only because she has painful cravings for nicotine, and obtains pleasure from smoking. Quite true! But, again, this verifies, rather than falsifies, the existence of motivations that are not self-interested. If we have a motivation (such as a craving for nicotine) that leads us to actions that we judge to be against our own self-interest (such as smoking a pack a day of cigarettes), then obviously not all of our motivations are self-interested. So humans have some motivations that are not self-interested – unless every cigarette smoker who says it would be *better for her* to quit smoking, but who fails because of *a strong desire to smoke anyway*, is either lying or mistaken.<sup>14</sup>

Returning to Yang Zhu, if his view is that ethics is a deformation of human nature, what kinds of things would cause this deformation? One text that (although historically late) *may* reflect the influence of Yang Zhu's ideas is the "Robber Zhi" chapter of the *Zhuangzi*. In this imaginary dialogue, Robber Zhi castigates Kongzi, arguing that his promotion of morality is due to a desire for fame and a mistaken conception of what is beneficial to oneself:

People who can be leashed by profit or whipped by words are called fools! . . . In your lust for eminence, there is no robber greater than you. If they call me Robber Zhi, why don't they call you Robber Qiu? . . . [The sage kings] all forcefully went against their essence and nature because profit confused them about their true self.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup>For a more detailed popular discussion, see Rachels, *Elements of Moral Philosophy*, pp. 53–64. (On ethical egoism, see *ibid.*, pp. 65–78.) Hobbes is the only important philosopher to advocate psychological egoism (*Leviathan*). His philosophical psychology was thoughtfully dissected by Joseph Butler, *Five Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel*.

<sup>15</sup>*Zhuangzi* 29, "Robber Zhi," *Readings*, pp. 372–73. (Robber Zhi mockingly calls Kongzi "Robber Qiu" because Qiu is Kongzi's personal name.) Cf. Graham, *Chuang-tzu*, pp. 236–38. The kind of "profit" that Robber Zhi refers to here is obviously not genuine individual

But anyone who discusses self-interest, whether in China or the West, will have to address the question of what *is* in one's self-interest. The available textual evidence is indeterminate between Yang Zhu's holding a position like 4 (to follow one's nature is to maximize one's health and longevity) and a position like 5 (to follow one's nature is to achieve a moderate and sustainable satisfaction of one's bodily desires). Position 5 does seem a bit more plausible, since position 4 raises the obvious objection, *Why* live a long time and preserve one's health, unless it gives one various kinds of pleasures? The "Robber Zhi" chapter does suggest that both long life and the satisfaction of sensory desires are important:

Now let me tell *you* something about the human essence. The eyes want to see colors. The ears want to hear sounds. The mouth wants to taste flavors. And the emotions want fulfillment. People live at most a hundred years. . . . Subtracting time spent recovering from illness, mourning death, and fretting over worries, there are only four or five days a month people can open their mouth and laugh. Heaven and earth go on forever, but people die when their time comes. Put this perishable good in that eternal space and its time flashes by like a galloping horse past a crack in the wall. If you're not gratifying your wishes and cherishing your days, then you do not understand the Way.<sup>16</sup>

Someone with a position that is generally like Yang Zhu's must answer a further challenge: how could society survive if everyone acted solely for his or her own self-interest? Position 6 provides a response to this challenge: everyone's well-being would be maximized if each pursued his or her own self-interest. In addition, position 6 is a close cousin (or perhaps we should say "uncle," since it is likely to be a generation earlier) of the utopianism associated with texts like the *Daodejing* (and arguably the *Zhuangzi*). The "Yangist" and "Daoist" visions of how to attain the utopia are very different. As Graham observes,

Yangism differs from its successors in having nothing mystical about it. It starts from the same calculations of benefit and harm as does Mohism, but its question is not, "How shall we benefit the world?" but "What is truly beneficial to man?", more specifically "What is truly beneficial to myself?"<sup>17</sup>

profit (which he would endorse) but is rather "profit" in the sense of wealth and property in excess of what is useful for one's own self-preservation and pleasure. Graham argues that the "Robber Zhi" dates from the end of the third century B.C.E. (Graham, *Chuang-tzu*, p. 234). I shall cite it several times in this section, but more as an illustration of my hypotheses about Yang Zhu than as a proof of my claims.

<sup>16</sup> *Zhuangzi* 29, "Robber Zhi," *Readings*, p. 374. (Emphasis in original translation.) Cf. Graham, *Chuang-tzu*, pp. 238–39.

<sup>17</sup> Graham, *Disputers*, p. 56.



But in philosophical Taoism health and life are nourished by *not* interfering with spontaneity by calculations of benefit and harm, while Yangist thinking is a meticulous weighing of means and ends.<sup>18</sup>

However, in each worldview, social utopia is achieved when everyone opts out of government service as much as possible and *never aims* to, in the words of the twentieth-century slogan, “serve the people” (為人民服務). In our “Yangist” test-text, Robber Zhi speaks favorably of ancient times when people

lay down dead tired and got up wide awake. They knew their mothers but not their fathers and lived together with the deer. They farmed their own food and wove their own clothes and had no idea of hurting each other. *This* was the high point Virtue achieved!<sup>19</sup>

He goes on to bemoan the fact that the situation deteriorated, and the sage kings whom the Ruists honor began a history of bloody warfare.

It is an intriguing possibility that Yang Zhu held something like position 7, advocating not strict egoism but rather what we might call “privatism.” Privatism, again, would be the view that one should act only for the interest of oneself and one’s immediate family. There is no firm evidence that Yang Zhu held this. But it is intriguing that Mengzi, in his parallel criticisms of Mozi and Yang Zhu, says “Yang is ‘for oneself.’ This is to have no ruler. Mo is ‘impartial caring.’ This is to have no father” (3B9). Now, if Yang Zhu were some sort of egoist, it should be at least as true of Yang Zhu as it is of Mozi that he “has no father.” However, if Yang Zhu is a “privatist,” he would have concern for his own parents, spouse and children, but he would reject any obligation to serve the community. In this sense, he could be said to “have no ruler” since he would not take office under a ruler or do what the ruler directed when it conflicted with his own or his family’s interest.<sup>20</sup> In addition, if Yang Zhu is a privatist, he agrees with Mengzi that humans naturally have concern for members of their own family. This would also perhaps make better sense of Mengzi’s comment that “Those who flee Mohism always turn toward

<sup>18</sup> Graham, *Disputers*, p. 58. Emphasis in original.

<sup>19</sup> Zhuangzi 29, “Robber Zhi,” *Readings*, p. 372. Emphasis in original. Cf. Graham, *Chuang-tzu*, p. 237.

<sup>20</sup> The interpretation of Yang Zhu as a “privatist” has been suggested by John J. Emerson, “Yang Chu’s Discovery of the Body.” Of course, Ruists would also recognize *some* circumstances in which one must disobey a ruler’s commands in the interest of one’s family (and, more rarely, in the interest of oneself). But Yang Zhu would seem to reject sacrifice of oneself or of one’s family for the greater good in all cases.

Yangism. Those who flee Yangism always turn toward Ruism" (7B26). It is easy to see how a disillusioned Mohist impartialist might convert to either egoism or privatism. But the conversion from "Yangism" to Ruism is perhaps easier to understand if "Yangism" already acknowledges the familial concern that is central to Ruism as well. Finally, if Yang Zhu is a privatist, we would understand better whom some of the Mohist arguments in the "Impartial Caring" essay are directed against. (Recall that some of those arguments seem to be directed against people who are concerned with their own well-being, but also with the well-being of their family members [Chapter 3, §V.B].) Position 7 is inconsistent with position 3, but Yang Zhu could hold position 7 in conjunction with any of positions 4, 5, or 6. We cannot be sure whether Yang Zhu held position 3 or position 7, but we do not need to emphasize this issue. In this chapter we are concerned with Yang Zhu in relation to Mengzi, and if Yang Zhu acknowledged that we naturally have affection for family members, Mengzi would not have argued against him regarding *this* point.

Did Yang Zhu have a developmental or an innate view of *xing*? The difference between the two views in this case is fairly small. Given the developmental conception of *xing*, Yang Zhu's claim would mean that, given a nurturing environment that is healthy for human beings, each of us will act only for our own self-interest. In contrast, on the innate conception of *xing*, Yang Zhu's claim would mean that human beings are born with a disposition to act for their own self-interest, but no disposition to act for the well-being of others. Neither view would entail that a human is incapable of being made to act against her own benefit or for something else (such as fame or the benefit of others). Just as water, which is naturally clear, can be made dirty, or just as a tree can be carved into cups and bowls, so could a human, on Yang Zhu's view, be warped into not acting for only her own self-interest. Thus, "Robber Zhi" condemns the supposedly virtuous, saying, "They were all men who, to get themselves a name, made light of death, and did not remember to nurture life from the roots to their destined old age."<sup>21</sup> The developmental and the innate conceptions do differ over why this happens. On the developmental picture, Yang Zhu would say that failing to receive the nurturing that is healthy for a human might lead one to act against one's interests. On the innate picture, the suggestion would be that acting against one's interest is the result of adverse environmental factors (such as Ruist or Mohist

<sup>21</sup> Graham, *Chuang-tzu*, p. 238.

teachings!) that warp one's innate nature. However, it seems likely that this is a distinction "as fine as the tip of an autumn hair" (to borrow a Chinese metaphor). Even if Yang Zhu had a developmental view of *xing*, he probably thought (as we are inclined to think today) that it does not take *much* encouragement for people to pursue their own interests. So the practical difference is slight between holding that self-interest is innate and holding that it is the development of tendencies that require only minimal nurturing. Consequently, I shall disregard the distinction in my discussion of Yang Zhu.

In summary, Yang Zhu was likely to have held that humans are self-interested by nature. Pursuing one's self-interest involves doing things that maximize one's health and longevity, and possibly also the prudent satisfaction of physical desires. Humans *can* be made to act for the sake of other things, but this will be a warping of their natural state. Furthermore, everyone will be better off if we simply follow our nature and act in a self-interested fashion. Yang Zhu may also have acknowledged that humans have natural feelings of concern for members of their immediate family, but he was not in disagreement with Mengzi about this last point.

We shall examine Mengzi's alternative conception of human nature and ethical cultivation in more detail, but first let us consider our primary source for Mengzi's views.

## II. TEXTUAL ISSUES

Although he asserted that he was not "fond of disputation" (3B9.1), Mengzi was a frequent and skilled debater, who employed techniques such as *reductio ad absurdum* (e.g., 6A3) and thought experiments (e.g., 2A6, 3A5) to attack rival philosophical positions. However, commentators have disagreed over what Mengzi's own constructive philosophical position was. Part of the difficulty is Mengzi's style of presentation. We have no surviving treatise in which Mengzi systematically lays out his own views. Why didn't Mengzi follow the Mohists in writing systematic essays?<sup>22</sup> I believe that Mengzi's style is, in part, dictated by his conceptions of human nature and ethical cultivation. Humans innately, Mengzi

<sup>22</sup> That is, assuming that there weren't some authentic essays in the "outer" chapters that Zhao Qi chose not to include in his edition. He tantalizingly reports that one of these was entitled "A Disputation on the Goodness of the Nature" (xìng shàn biàn 性善辯). (On Zhao Qi, see later in this section.)

thinks, have incipient virtuous inclinations (2A6). The task of ethical cultivation is a matter of gently nurturing these inclinations so that they grow into full virtues. A lack of cultivation may damage the inclinations, but so may the effort to force the inclinations to develop faster than they are able (2A2.16). Mengzi may have felt that the best way to stimulate ethical growth in others is through finding the well-turned phrase, the right metaphor, or the best illustration at precisely the right time for *this particular individual's development*. A systematic ethical treatise might overwhelm the beginner, leaving him both baffled and with a distaste for ethics. (And do we find anything different with most of our students in philosophy classrooms today?) The result is that Mengzi's comments are very context-sensitive. This makes Mengzi seem very unsystematic. However, I hope to show that, if we read the text of the *Mengzi* as a whole, we shall find that Mengzi is a remarkably systematic thinker. Indeed, I think that Mengzi is much more systematic, and not as particularistic, as Kongzi.

Graham, who has done some of the most important work on the philosophical difficulties provided by various early philosophical texts, remarks that the *Mengzi* "is unusual among the early philosophical texts in raising no problems of authenticity," and we can almost hear his sigh of relief as he writes this.<sup>23</sup> Regarding the composition of the *Mengzi* itself, the two theories are that it was composed by Mengzi himself (after he "retired" from his efforts at public service) with the assistance of his disciples Wan Zhang and Gongsun Chou, or that it was composed by those disciples soon after Mengzi's death.

Zhào Qí (趙岐, d. 201 C.E.) wrote the first surviving commentary on the *Mengzi*. He reports that there were in his era eleven books (書) attributed to Mengzi, divided into seven "inner" books and four "outer" books. Based on their content (which he unfortunately does not describe in detail), Zhao Qi did not regard the outer books as authentic, so he did not include them in his edition of the *Mengzi*. Zhao Qi's edition became the standard, so the four books he did not include have been lost over time. Zhao Qi subdivided the seven books he regarded as authentic into "upper" and "lower" sections (called "A" and "B" in English). So, in citing the *Mengzi*, one typically identifies a passage by giving the book number, followed by "A" or "B," followed by the number of the chapter (zhāng 章).

<sup>23</sup> Graham, *Disputers*, p. 111. This is the consensus view. See, for example, Lau, *Mencius*, Appendix 3: "The Text of the *Mencius*."

as identified by Zhao Qi. The first passage in the *Mengzi* is thus 1A1. (For longer passages, I sometimes also give the “verse” number, which is simply the number assigned to sections within chapters according to James Legge’s translation. Legge breaks the verses at the points that Zhu Xi inserts commentary.)

I agree with the consensus view that the *Mengzi* is a remarkably well-preserved and reliable text overall, but I do question the authenticity of two passages: 4A12 and 7A4. In both passages we find a use of the word “chéng 誠” that is unusual in the *Mengzi*. Normally in the *Mengzi*, “cheng” is an adverb: “genuinely,” “truly,” “actually.” But in 4A12 and 7A4, it has the sense “true to oneself” or “true to one’s nature.” In this sense, “cheng” is a technical philosophic term in certain wings of Ruism. (See, for example, *The Mean*, chapters 20–25.) Now, consider the following facts. (1) In the *Mengzi*, “cheng” occurs with this special sense in only these two passages. (2) Close versions of *Mengzi* 4A12 are found in *The Mean* (chapter 20) and in *Sayings of the Kong Family School* (Kǒngzǐ jiāyǔ 孔子家語), both works that are considerably later than the *Mengzi* – but in neither text is the passage attributed to *Mengzi*.<sup>24</sup> (3) The “chain of argument” style of 4A12 is common to other early Ruist texts, but not to the *Mengzi*. (Interestingly, it is the same style we saw in *Analects* 13.3, another suspicious passage [cf. Chapter 2, §I.B.2].) (4) *Mengzi* 7A4 contains the only occurrence in the *Mengzi* of the term “shù 恕” (“that which you do not like, do not inflict on others”), which is also a key term in *The Mean*, chapter 13. (On the use of “shu” in the *Analects*, see my Chapter 2, §I.B.1.) (5) *Mengzi* 7A4 contains the only occurrence in the *Mengzi* of the phrases “wàn wù 萬物” (“the ten thousand things”) and “wàn wù jiē bèi 萬物皆備” (“the ten thousand things are all brought to completion”). However, the phrases “wan wu” and “wàn wù bèi 萬物備” (“the ten thousand things are brought to completion”) are both found in later philosophic texts such as the *Zhuangzi* and the *Xunzi*. Conclusion: 4A12 and 7A4 are interpolations in the *Mengzi*.

However, these are exceptions in an otherwise very coherent and well-preserved text. With this philological preface out of the way, let us turn to the content of *Mengzi*’s philosophy.

<sup>24</sup> Zhu Xi’s characteristically ingenious solution is that *Mengzi* is self-consciously quoting Kongzi in this passage, so the other texts naturally attribute the passage to Kongzi rather than to *Mengzi* (*Sishu jizhu*, commentary on *Mengzi* 4A12). But this is plausible only with a number of historical and textual assumptions that no longer seem compelling to us today.

## III. MENGZI ON HUMAN NATURE

Mengzi says, “Humaneness is being a human” (7B16).<sup>25</sup> The word I have here rendered “humaneness” is “*rén* 仁,” which we saw was, for Kongzi, the summation of human virtuousness. Mengzi often uses the same term in a narrower sense, to refer to a particular virtue, benevolence, which is characterized by compassion. However, in passages like 7B16, “*ren*” seems to retain its earlier, broader sense. (As 2A6 makes clear, “*ren*” in a narrow sense is just one of the four virtues required for humanity.) So what does Mengzi mean by saying that being a human is humaneness or human virtuousness? He cannot mean that all humans are already fully virtuous. This is not only patently false, but Mengzi seems explicitly and painfully aware of the fact that most humans are far from full virtue. What can Mengzi mean, then?

We get a hint from Mengzi’s frequent use of metaphors of agricultural growth:

In years of plenty, most young men are gentle; in years of poverty, most young men are violent. It is not that the potential (*cái* 才) that Heaven confers on them varies like this. They are like this because of that by which their hearts are sunk and drowned.

Consider barley. Sow the seeds and cover them. The soil is the same and the time of planting is also the same. They grow rapidly, and by the time of the summer solstice they have all ripened. Although there are some differences, these are due to the richness of the soil, and to unevenness in the rain and in human effort. (6A7)

This passage suggests that humans are born with a certain potential (here, “*cái* 才”) for virtue, which can be either nurtured or stunted. In other passages, Mengzi uses the term “*xìng* 性” (“nature”) to refer to the course of development that a thing has the potential to realize if given a healthy environment. According to Mengzi, not only is there such a potential and such a course of development, but (not only for humans, but for things in general) the full realization of the potential of a kind of thing provides a standard for evaluating an instance of that kind. Thus, when asked to clarify his teaching that “human nature is good” (*xìng shàn* 性善), Mengzi responds, “As for what [humans] genuinely are (*qíng* 情), they can become good (*wéi shàn* 為善). This is what I mean by calling [their natures] good.

<sup>25</sup> 仁也者人也。Similarly, in *The Mean*, chapter 20, we find 仁者人也。See Schwitzgebel, “Human Nature and Moral Development in Mencius, Xunzi, Hobbes, and Rousseau,” for an insightful account that is more comparative than the one I offer in this section.

As for their becoming not good, this is not the fault of their potential (才) (6A6). In the same passage, Mengzi goes on to remark that “Some differ from others by two, five or countless times – this is because they cannot exhaust their potentials,” and then quotes approvingly an ode that says, “Heaven gives birth to the teeming people. / If there is a thing, there is a norm (有物有則).”<sup>26</sup>

Obviously, the natures of different kinds of creatures will differ. Thus, Mengzi takes it to be a *reductio ad absurdum* of the view of the rival philosopher Gaozi that it entails that the nature of a dog is the same as the nature of an ox, and the nature of an ox is the same as the nature of a human (6A3, discussed later in §VI.A.1). Similarly, Mengzi condemns someone by saying that “one would have to be an earthworm” (rather than a human) to realize the ideals that person espouses (3B10). For each creature there will be a capacity to lead a course of life that realizes that thing’s specific nature.

Mengzi does not merely assert that humans have such a nature; he provides arguments for his thesis. Philip Ivanhoe has provided a helpful typology of Mengzi’s arguments that humans innately have dispositions toward virtue: “thought experiments,” “give-aways,” and “historical precedents.”<sup>27</sup> Mengzi appeals to historical precedent when he argues that the actions of the sages show that humans are capable of virtue, and that virtue is innate. So, for example, Mengzi says that Sage King Shun was raised in a bad familial environment (5A2) and was originally completely uncultivated, but he was able to respond to what insignificant virtuous aspects of his environment there were and to develop ethically (7A16) – something that would be impossible if there were not innate tendencies toward virtue.

“Give-aways” are reactions people spontaneously have that reveal their own good nature. For example, when King Xuan spared an ox being led to slaughter (1A7) out of pity over its suffering, this was an indication of his good nature (even though Xuan himself did not recognize this until Mengzi explained it to him).

But, of Mengzi’s arguments for the goodness of human nature, perhaps the most recognizable and interesting to contemporary philosophers are

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *The Mean*, chapter 13: “In carving an ax handle, in carving an ax handle, / the standard is not far off.”

<sup>27</sup> Ivanhoe, *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation*, pp. 18–19, idem, *Ethics in the Confucian Tradition*, pp. 39–40.

the thought experiments. The most famous of these is the “child at the well” story from 2A6:

All people have hearts (xīn 心) that are not indifferent to others. The former kings had hearts that were not indifferent to others, and so they had rulerships that were not indifferent to others. If one puts into effect rulership that is not indifferent to others with a heart that is not indifferent to others, governing the world is in the palm of one’s hand.

I say that all people have a heart that is not indifferent toward others because of the following: Suppose a person were to suddenly see a child about to fall into a well. Anyone would have a feeling of alarm and sympathy. This would not be in order to make connections with the parents of the child; it would not be in order to gain fame among one’s fellow villagers and friends; it would not be because one would dislike the sound of his crying.

From this we can see that if one’s heart has no sympathy, one is not a person. If one’s heart has no sense of shame one is not a person. If one’s heart has no deference, one is not a person. If one’s heart neither approves nor disapproves, one is not a person.

The heart’s sympathy is the sprout (duān 端) of benevolence. The heart’s sense of shame is the sprout of righteousness. The heart’s deference is the sprout of propriety. The heart’s approving and disapproving is the sprout of wisdom.

People have these four sprouts like they have four limbs. To have these four sprouts but to say, “I am unable,” is to steal from oneself. To say of one’s ruler, “He is unable,” is to steal from one’s ruler. Generally speaking, having these four sprouts within oneself, if one simply knows to expand and fill them out, it will be like a fire starting up, or a spring breaking through. If one can simply fill them out, they will be sufficient to care for all within the four seas. But if one fails to fill them out, they will be insufficient to serve even one’s parents.

This passage includes two key terms in Mengzi’s philosophical psychology: “heart” and “sprout.”

“Heart” is how I have chosen to render 心 xīn, which has also been translated “heart-mind” or “mind.” Mengzi’s use of this term is complex but systematic. In its “focal meaning,” *xin* refers to the psychological faculty that thinks and that feels emotions.<sup>28</sup> By metonymy, the term refers to the emotions that faculty manifests. And by synecdoche, the term can refer to any one of the four aspects (almost like subfaculties) of the *xin* that manifest the emotions and attitudes characteristic of Mengzi’s

<sup>28</sup> On the notion of a “focal meaning,” see Yearley, *Mencius and Aquinas*, pp. 188–96. The focal meaning of a term need not be the same as its original meaning. The term *xin* 心 seems to have referred originally to the heart as a physical organ.



four cardinal virtues. (I discuss each of these virtues in detail later in §V.) Notice that the *xin* combines cognitive and affective aspects. It knows and feels, perceives and desires. We do not see here a sharp division between the cognitive and affective aspects of the mind. This division is characteristic of much post-Cartesian Western philosophy. (Interestingly, it is not characteristic of most *pre*-Cartesian Western thought. For Plato, for example, to know the good is to love it.) This combination of cognition and affection will be important in understanding what I shall later refer to as Mengzi's "outer-directed ethical self-cultivation" (§IV.B.2).

Turning to "sprout," I follow D. C. Lau, David Nivison, Sarah Allan, and others in taking duān 端 (which would normally mean "tip" or "endpoint") to be equivalent in this context to duān 𡩺, which means (and was originally a pictograph of) the "sprout" of a plant. (This is evident in the small seal form of the character, where the middle horizontal line represents the surface of the soil: 𡩺.) There is, though, a strong argument against this reading: there are no known examples, outside of 2A6, of 端 being used as a substitution for 𡩺. However, I believe that the case for reading 端 as 𡩺 is compelling. First, we notice the graphic similarity. 𡩺 is, of course, the right side of 端. It is functioning in 端 as a phonetic component, but it may very well contribute to the meaning of the character as well. Second, note that 𡩺 is archaic by Mengzi's era. Had Mengzi wished to use the word 𡩺, he might very well have chosen to write it using 端. Furthermore, if Mengzi had originally written 𡩺, a later scribe might have "corrected" it to 端. Third (and to my mind this is the decisive factor), Mengzi is tremendously fond of using the cultivation of "sprouts" as a metaphor for ethical cultivation. And he uses a broad range of terms in different passages that have the general meaning of "sprout": miáo 苗 (2A2.16), méng 萌 (6A8, 6A9), and niè 孽 (6A8). These metaphors are important for conveying Mengzi's notion that we naturally have only incipient dispositions toward virtue, and that these dispositions require cultivation in order to grow into mature virtues. Consequently, reading 端 as "sprout" makes it fit in with Mengzi's overall set of metaphors for ethical cultivation.

Nonetheless, if I am wrong, it does not require a drastic revision of my interpretation of the passage. If 端 means "tip" or "endpoint," Mengzi is saying that, for example, "the heart's sympathy is the tip of benevolence," which I take to mean that "the heart's sympathy is the beginning of benevolence." This would be misleading if we thought of sympathy as the tip of an already complete line segment that is benevolence. Such an interpretation would fail to do justice to the developmental aspect

of Mengzi's view of cultivation. However, as long as we envision our initial sympathy as something that has to be extended to reach its full potential, the interpretation of 端 as "tip" is consistent with my overall interpretation.<sup>29</sup>

Turning to the content of 2A6 as a whole, the key section is the child-at-the-well thought experiment. Mengzi asks us to consider what we think a person (rén 人, "human") would do if suddenly confronted with the sight of a child about to fall into a well. He expects us to agree that "anyone" (jiē 皆, "all") would have a "heart of alarm and sympathy" (chùtù cèyǐn zhī xīn 怵惕惻隱之心) in this situation. Furthermore, he says that this reaction is distinct from any ulterior motives, such as the desire to make a connection with the child's (possibly influential) parents, or the desire for praise, or even just annoyance at the sound of the child crying once it falls into the well.

It is important to notice what Mengzi does *not* say here. Mengzi does not say that everyone would actually *act* to save the child. Anyone who has frozen in a moment of crisis knows that this is not necessarily true. Furthermore, Mengzi is concerned with the reaction that we have "suddenly" (zhà 乍). He believes that the sudden, prereflective character of the reaction suggests that it is an authentic expression of our nature. It may be that, the moment after we have the feeling of compassion, we start to reflect on the possible benefits and risks of saving the child. Perhaps we realize that this is the child of our enemy, or that we are in danger of falling into the well ourselves if we try to snatch it away, or that we would be considered a hero if we saved the child.

Still, a troubling question remains. Would *everyone* actually have the reaction that Mengzi describes? We are vividly aware nowadays of sociopaths and serial killers, some of whom seem not just indifferent to the suffering of others, but actually seem to enjoy causing suffering to others – including small children. Mengzi addresses this general issue in the story of "Ox Mountain" in 6A8. But before we examine this passage, let's look at a thought experiment parallel to 2A6, in which Mengzi argues for the existence of the sprout of righteousness:

A basket of food and a bowl of soup – if one gets them, then one will live; if one doesn't get them, then one will die. But if they're given with contempt, then even a homeless person will not accept them. If they are trampled

<sup>29</sup> Zhu Xi does interpret 端 as xù 緒, "tip," which he understands as an indicator of a fully formed virtuous nature (*Sishu jizhu*, commentary on 2A6). I think we see here, again, the influence of Buddhist discovery metaphors of self-cultivation on Zhu Xi.

upon, then even a beggar won't take them. However, when it comes to a salary of ten thousand bushels of grain, then one doesn't notice propriety and righteousness and accepts them. What do ten thousand bushels add to me? Do I accept them for the sake of a beautiful mansion? . . . In the previous case, for the sake of one's own life one did not accept what was offered. In the current case, for the sake of a beautiful mansion one does it. . . . Is this indeed something that one can't stop doing? This is what is called losing one's fundamental heart.

Although the term "sprout" does not occur in this passage, it seems to be read most naturally as an illustration of the sprout of righteousness. Mengzi makes the psychological claim that no human would allow himself to be disgraced, even if that were necessary for survival. If this were true, it would follow that all humans have the sprout of righteousness, since the disposition that drives us to avoid shame or disgrace is precisely this sprout. (I examine the relationship between shame and righteousness later in §V.B.) However, it seems that the psychological claim Mengzi makes is implausible. We know of cases of individuals who have humiliated themselves in all sorts of ways in order to survive. But, in order to demonstrate the existence of the sprout of righteousness, Mengzi does not need to make such a strong claim. For the purposes of demonstrating that there is a sprout of righteousness, Mengzi needs only one claim to be true: for every human there are *some* actions that she avoids doing, despite the fact that these actions would obtain what she desires, because she believes that the actions are shameful.

There is an important similarity between 6A10 and 2A6: both suggest that there are situations in which we would not, given our current level of cultivation, have compassion or a reaction of disdain, but in which we *should* have compassion or a reaction of disdain, because the latter situations are similar in ethically relevant details to the former. *Mengzi* 2A6 indicates that we must "expand and fill out" our sprouts of benevolence. *Mengzi* 6A10 suggests that we should be just as unwilling to sacrifice our dignity for a huge salary as we are for a handout. The process of coming to have these reactions is called "extension."

I discuss "extension" later (§IV.B.2), but first we should address an obvious question that I postponed. What if a human failed to manifest a sprout of benevolence, or a sprout of righteousness, or both? It seems clear that there are such people. The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV) identifies "antisocial personality disorder," in which a person shows a pattern of behavior that frequently violates laws and social norms and often involves theft of or damage to the property

of others and physical assault. Approximately six percent of US males and one percent of US females are believed to have antisocial personality disorder.<sup>30</sup> Some researchers subdivide the antisocial personality into two types: psychopaths and sociopaths. Although there is not agreement on the terminology, one way to mark this division would be to say that psychopaths lack normal human feelings such as empathy, whereas sociopaths have more or less normal human feelings and motivations, but were never properly socialized.<sup>31</sup> The sociopath has feelings of empathy and a conscience of sorts, but he was never habituated to delayed gratification, honesty, respect for others, and so forth. The sociopath per se does not actually present a special problem for Mengzi's view. Indeed, Mengzi insists on the importance of cultivating one's sprouts. The psychopath, however, is more of a challenge. What the psychopath seems to lack are precisely the sprouts of benevolence and righteousness.

Mengzi states explicitly in 2A6 that "if one's heart has no sympathy, one is not a person. If one's heart has no sense of shame one is not a person." But what does this mean? And is it plausible? The answers to these questions depend on what Mengzi means by rén 人 ("human" or "person"). There are at least three possibilities. (1) Mengzi may be making a claim about all members of the species *homo sapiens*. Of course, Mengzi will not have our precise modern notion of a species, but he will certainly be able to conceptualize human animals as a group in distinction from nonhuman animals. (See, e.g., 3B9.4, where *ren* are distinguished from niǎo shòu 鳥獸, "birds and beasts.") (2) Mengzi may be making a claim about a large subset of the members of the human species that is defined in terms of its members having some kind of proper cultivation. (This is related to the notion that *ren* may sometimes be used to refer to noble people in distinction from mín 民, "the common people.")<sup>32</sup> (3) Mengzi may be making what is sometimes called a "generic claim" about humans.<sup>33</sup> This would mean that Mengzi was making a claim about what "normal" human beings are like. In other words, Mengzi's thought experiment asks us (on this third reading) to imagine a human who

<sup>30</sup> Oltmanns et al., *Case Studies in Abnormal Psychology*, p. 299.

<sup>31</sup> Compare Oltmanns et al., *Case Studies in Abnormal Psychology*, pp. 298–99, and Lykken, *Antisocial Personalities*, pp. 21–38. (Neither source uses the terms quite as I do, but there is agreement that there is a distinction among antisocial personalities between those who do, and those who do not, have feelings such as love and empathy.)

<sup>32</sup> See Lau, *Analects*, pp. 16–17, Ames, "Mencian Conception of *Ren Xing*," pp. 149, 162–63, and Shun, *Mencius*, pp. 190–92.

<sup>33</sup> Ivanhoe, "Confucian Self Cultivation and Mengzi's Notion of Extension," pp. 222–23.

has neither congenital abnormalities nor has been subject to extremely negative environmental influences that would adversely affect her ethical inclinations.

On the first reading, according to which rén 人 has the same referent as “member(s) of the human species,” Mengzi’s claim turns out to be transparently false because of the examples of psychopaths. Consequently, it would be charitable to find an alternative interpretation of Mengzi’s claim.

The second interpretation raises the questions of what characteristics humans must have in order to be rén 人, and how many humans have those characteristics. At one extreme, Mengzi might wish to limit his claim to certain members of the ethical nobility. This would make 2A6 and 6A10 essentially trivial, though. Mengzi would be stating that all those in group N have trait S, where possession of trait S is a necessary condition for membership in group N. (One is reminded of Lincoln’s quip: “Those who like this sort of book will find that this is the sort of book that they like.”) Furthermore, this reading would entail that Mengzi is not interested in human nature in 2A6 or 6A10 at all. Rather, on this reading, he is interested in distinguishing one social or ethical class of humans from another. This is conceivable, but his use of agricultural metaphors keeps drawing us back to the conclusion that he *is* interested in the natures of various things. Plants do not have social classes.

The third interpretation is similar to the second interpretation in holding that some cultivation or enculturation is required (at least typically) in order for humans to have the “sprouts.” However, the cultivation or enculturation that is required is the minimal kind that we would expect any human other than a feral child to receive. Furthermore, according to the third interpretation, membership in *ren* may be compromised by the damage done by a bad environment (e.g., severe childhood abuse) or ethically relevant congenital abnormalities. In short, on the third interpretation, *ren*, although they will differ in many ways, are humans who are within the broad bounds of normality for their species.

An old joke may help to illustrate this third interpretation. Supposedly, a philosophy professor in a medieval university announced in class that humans may be defined as featherless bipeds. The next day, one of his pupils told the professor that he had a counterexample to that definition, and handed him a plucked chicken. This anecdote is amusing (well, mildly amusing), but any competent medieval philosophy professor would have immediately replied that the definition “featherless biped” is meant to distinguish representative examples of humans from

representative examples of nonhuman animals. Obviously, a plucked chicken is not a representative example of a chicken. In other words, “humans are featherless bipeds” is a generic claim.

That this is the proper interpretation of Mengzi’s claim is supported by his comment in 2A6 that “People have these four sprouts like they have four limbs.” Surely, Mengzi knows that some people – either through genetic defect or hostile environment – do not have four limbs. Similarly, some members of our species may lack the four sprouts. But in neither case are these representative samples of a human.

But doesn’t this risk the danger of doing what I accused the second interpretation of doing: reducing the arguments of 2A6 and 6A10 to tautologies? When Mengzi states, “if one’s heart has no sympathy, one is not a person,” is this true simply because “person” means “someone who has sympathy”? I don’t believe so. We can see that the child-at-the-well thought experiment has content because there are several kinds of evidence that could support (or challenge) it. One piece of evidence in favor of it is to consider the disanalogy that there seems to be between the child-at-the-well case and cases in which it seems clear no normal feature of humans is at stake. For example, suppose someone were to suddenly be offered butterscotch ice cream. Would everyone in this situation have a desire to eat the ice cream? Obviously not. Some people just don’t like butterscotch ice cream. Suppose someone insisted that any normal human likes butterscotch ice cream and that those who do not like butterscotch ice cream must either have some genetic defect or have suffered severe negative conditioning from their environment that has destroyed their natural ability to appreciate butterscotch ice cream. This is monstrously implausible, precisely because one cannot fill out the account of the genetic or environmental damage that destroys the supposedly normal ability to appreciate butterscotch ice cream. The fact that one *can* give a plausible account of genetic and environmental factors that distinguish psychopaths from the rest of us speaks in favor of a sense of sympathy as an aspect of human normalcy, whereas the impossibility of giving a corresponding account for “butterscotchphobes” suggests that such people are not abnormal.

My “butterscotchphobe” example is whimsical, so let’s pick one that is less so. Suppose anthropologists discovered a culture, let’s call them the “Bull,” with the following characteristics. The Bull routinely lie, steal from, and assault one another, even close family members. They assist others only when it is clearly in their own short-term interest to do so. The Bull can never rely on long-term benefits from cooperation, since they

are quick to violate promises and commitments to one another. When told that there are people in the world who assist others without the immediate expectation of reward, the Bull laugh scornfully, because they either regard these reports as incredible or think that people who act in the way reported are naive fools. The Bull regard it as amusing to watch others suffer. If a child who is not old enough to know better reaches to touch the fire, the Bull do not attempt to stop it, but wait gleefully for it to get hurt, then laugh happily as it cries. Finally, the Bull do not regard any of the preceding behavior as shameful. Indeed, they seem to lack shame about anything. If a culture like the Bull were reported, this would be empirical evidence *against* Mengzi's thought experiments in 2A6 and 6A10.<sup>34</sup>

But would the existence of the Bull be a definitive falsification of Mengzi's view? No. Mengzi provides a way to address a case like the Bull with his story of "Ox Mountain." In this story, Mengzi uses a sprout metaphor to illustrate that, because of the fragility of the human ethical potential, it is possible to fail to recognize what something "genuinely is" (qíng 情) because one is misled by the appearance of instances of that kind raised in very injurious environments:

The trees of Ox Mountain were once beautiful. But because it bordered on a large state, hatchets and axes besieged it. Could it remain verdant? Due to the rest it got during the day or night, and the moisture of rain and dew, it was not that there were no sprouts or shoots growing there. But oxen and sheep then came and grazed on them. Hence, it was as if it were barren. People, seeing it barren, believed that there had never been any timber there. Could this be the nature (性) of the mountain?!

When we consider what is present in people, could they truly lack the hearts of benevolence and righteousness? That by which they discard their good heart is simply like the hatchets and axes in relation to the trees. With them besieging it day by day, can it remain beautiful? With the rest it gets during the day or night, and the [restorative effects of the] morning mist, their likes and dislikes are sometimes close to those of others. But then

<sup>34</sup> Some readers may recognize that my account of the mythical Bull (including the story of their glee at a child burning itself) is based on anthropologist Colin Turnbull's account of the Ik tribe of Africa (*The Mountain People*). The Ik are real, but Turnbull's story about them turned out to be largely fictional. (See, e.g., Barth, "On Responsibility and Humanity," and Grinker, *In the Arms of Africa*). However, I am using Turnbull's account only as the inspiration for a thought experiment intended to illustrate that Mengzi's view has empirical content, so it doesn't matter that Turnbull was lying. One might argue that there are in fact cultures that are like the Bull, as for example the culture within some maximum security prisons. This may be so, but I think such prison culture provides an illustration of Mengzi's "Ox Mountain" case (discussed later in this section).

what they do during the day again fetters and destroys it. If the fettering is repeated, then the evening mist is insufficient to preserve it. If the evening mist is insufficient to preserve it, then one is not far from a bird or beast. Others see that he is a bird or beast, and think that there was never any capacity (才) there. Is this what a human truly is (情)?!

Hence, if it merely gets nourishment, there is nothing that will not grow. If it merely loses its nourishment, there is nothing that will not vanish. (6A8)<sup>35</sup>

How might this apply to the case of the Bull? Suppose we discovered these further facts about the Bull. One or two generations ago, the Bull were forcibly relocated from their ancestral lands. Because of the change in their natural environment, and the loss of their accumulated capital (farms, tools, homes, religious shrines, village schools, and so forth), the traditional Bull economic and social relationships were no longer practical in their new homeland. As a result, the Bull were subjected to poverty, starvation, and an almost complete breakdown in their governmental, religious, and other social institutions. In addition, the new neighbors of the Bull are militarily stronger than they are and hostile to them, so the Bull are subject to frequent raids and persecution. If *this* were the case, a Mengzian would argue that the Bull had been subjected, like “Ox Mountain,” to an environment that was actively and massively hostile to the growth and even the continued existence of their sprouts of benevolence and righteousness. Consequently, there is an explanation for why they lack what Mengzi argues are innate features of human nature.

But doesn’t *this* show that Mengzi’s theory lacks any empirical content? Couldn’t *any* apparent evidence against Mengzi’s view be accommodated? No, because Mengzi’s response to the case of the Bull depends on there being a plausible story one can tell about their social collapse and their hostile natural and social environment. If the Bull had undergone no cultural collapse, if they had lived for generations in an environment

<sup>35</sup> My interpretation of *qing* follows Dai Zhen, *Mengzi ziyi shuzheng*, no. 30; Lau, *Mencius* (translations of 6A6 and 6A8); and Shun, *Mencius*, pp. 183–86 and 214–15. Some others interpret *qing* as “passions,” and there are passages in early texts where it might be more plausible to read it this way. One way of simultaneously accommodating those passages and the use of *qing* in the *Mengzi* would be to say that, in its *thin* sense, “qing” refers to the characteristics by which a thing is what it is, and without which it would not merit being called by that name. However, human passions would then be one *thick* specification of what this human *qing* is. Note that the “Robber Zhi” dialogue (§I) gives a thick account of *qing* very different from that of Mengzi: “the human essence (*qing*)” is that the “eyes want to see colors. The ears want to hear sounds. The mouth wants to taste flavors. And the emotions want fulfillment.”



rich in easily obtained natural resources, if they had friendly neighbors who exemplified for them kindness and decency – yet the Bull still were cruel and shameless – this would be very strong evidence against Mengzi's view.<sup>36</sup>

In summary, Mengzi thinks that (at least some) things have characteristics that, although they may be distinct from their superficial appearances, characterize their *qíng* 情, or what they “genuinely are.” For living things, this includes the potential (*cái* 才) to develop in certain ways if given a healthy environment. The course of life and characteristics that result from realizing this potential (the *xìng* 性, or “nature” of that kind of thing) provide a standard for what is “good,” or the evaluative “norm” for that kind of thing. Consequently, when Mengzi says that “Humane-ness is being a human,” he is implying that humans, as part of what they are, have a potential to develop full virtue, which they can and should realize.

But why should this lead Mengzi to say specifically that human nature is *good*? This question also occurred to Mengzi's disciple, Gongduzi, who said,

(1) Gaozi says, “Human nature is neither good nor not good.” (2) Some say, “Human nature can become good, and it can become not good.” Therefore, when Sage Kings Wen and Wu arose, the people were fond of goodness. When Tyrants You and Li arose, the people were fond of destructiveness. (3) Some say, “There are natures that are good, and there are natures that are not good.” Therefore, with Sage King Yao as ruler, there was Xiang. With the Blind Man as his father, there was Sage King Shun. And with Tyrant Zhou as their nephew, and as their ruler besides, there were Viscount Qi of Wei and Prince Bi Gan. (4) Now, you say that human nature is good. Are all those others, then, wrong?

Mengzi said, “As for what they genuinely are (*qíng*), they can become good. This is what I mean by calling it good. As for their becoming not good, this is not the fault of their potential.” (6A6)

We can see immediately why Mengzi would reject the second and third positions. He would suggest that, on the basis of arguments such as his thought experiments, we can see that each human (with the exception of Ox Mountain cases) has the active potential to become virtuous. This was as true under Tyrants You and Li as it was under Sage Kings Wen and

<sup>36</sup> We cannot expect proof on this topic; the most we can hope for is evidence that supports or argues against Mengzi's view. But this is not a weakness of Mengzi's position. Recall my comments in Chapter 3, §IV.D.2: “proof” is unobtainable even in natural science (with the possible exception of mathematics).

Wu. However, it is not clear at first glance how Mengzi has distinguished his position from that of Gaozi. When we look at Mengzi's arguments with Gaozi in more detail later (§VI.A), it will become clear that Gaozi agrees that humans should become virtuous and are capable of doing so. But keep in mind that, when Mengzi talks about the human "potential" to become good or about what humans "genuinely are," he is referring to the sprouts, which are innate and *active* tendencies toward virtue. This is confirmed in the continuation of the quoted passage, in which Mengzi goes on to talk about the four hearts and four associated cardinal virtues (from 2A6). So Mengzi rejects Gaozi's view because it was intended by Gaozi to deny that humans have active tendencies toward virtue.

Two important positions are not mentioned by Gongduzi, one of which was defended by the earlier philosopher Shi Shi, that human nature has both good and bad elements in it. Again, it seems at first glance as if Mengzi could agree with this view. The sprouts would be the good aspect of our nature, and ethical cultivation would be a matter of cultivating their growth while stunting the growth of the bad aspects of our nature. But what would the bad aspects of our nature be? An ascetic might answer that the bad aspects of our nature are our sensual desires for food, sex, and so forth. But Mengzi clearly thinks that sensual desires are not, in themselves, unethical or bad. Indeed, he is at pains to stress with one ruler that being a good ruler is perfectly consistent with desiring sex and wealth – so long as he sees to it that his subjects can satisfy their desires for these things too (1B5)! Consequently, according to Mengzi, all the elements of our nature are good. Doing wrong is the result only of certain aspects of one's nature being overdeveloped relative to other aspects of one's nature.

The second major alternative not mentioned by Gongduzi is the position, later defended by Xunzi, that human nature is bad. What would *this* mean? It is tempting to associate it with the Augustinean view that humans are capable of doing evil for the sake of evil. However, no one in the Chinese tradition has ever defended this view.<sup>37</sup> Part of what Xunzi means in saying that human nature is bad is that humans lack any innate tendencies toward virtue. But in this he agrees with Gaozi. Indeed, Gaozi's metaphor of ethical cultivation as carving wood is very similar to Xunzi's metaphors of cultivation as steaming and bending wood or dying cloth. (And, of course, these are quite similar to the ethical cultivation metaphor that Kongzi heartily endorses, "like cutting, like carving, like grinding, like polishing" jade, and dissimilar from Mengzi's metaphors

<sup>37</sup>See Van Norden, "Mencius and Augustine," and Stalnaker, *Overcoming Our Evil*.

of cultivating sprouts!)"<sup>38</sup> So why does Xunzi not simply say with Gaozi that human nature is neither good nor bad? Part of the answer is given by a passing comment Mengzi makes about Gaozi. In describing a certain exalted ethical state, Mengzi says that it "is produced by accumulated righteousness. It cannot be obtained by a seizure of righteousness. If some of one's actions leave one's heart unsatisfied, it will starve. Consequently, I say that Gaozi never understood righteousness, because he regarded it as external" (2A2.15). What does Mengzi mean in saying that the exalted state in question "cannot be obtained by a seizure of righteousness"? David Nivison has offered a hypothesis according to which Gaozi was a "voluntarist," for whom becoming virtuous was a fairly simple matter of making a commitment to being such a person. According to Gaozi, the process Mengzi recommended of gradually and carefully cultivating one's sprouts of virtue is unnecessary. Now we are in a position to see why Xunzi went as far as to say that human nature is bad. Xunzi disagreed with Mengzi that humans have innate dispositions toward virtue. However, he also disagreed with Gaozi over the difficulty of ethical cultivation. Xunzi's discussions of this topic (for example in both "Encouraging Learning" and "Self Cultivation") make clear that cultivation is an arduous and time-consuming process with many steps along the way. Xunzi's slogan that human nature is bad makes clear where he disagrees with Mengzi, but also where he disagrees with Gaozi.<sup>39</sup>

#### IV. ETHICAL CULTIVATION

Mengzi has an elaborate view of the forms of ethical cultivation. To bring out the richness of his position, I have labeled the following aspects. "Passive cultivation" refers to environmental factors that are conducive to ethical development. "Self-cultivation" refers to practices that an individual engages in through his own agency. Self-cultivation may be divided

<sup>38</sup> Compare *Mengzi* 6A1, Xunzi, "Encouraging Learning," and *Analects* 1.15, respectively. On the role of metaphors in early Chinese thought, see Slingerland, *Effortless Action*.

<sup>39</sup> For his hypothesis about Gaozi, see Nivison, "Philosophical Voluntarism in Fourth-Century China." In my later discussion of Gaozi, I shall argue that to claim righteousness is external is to hold that righteousness is a matter of performing the action appropriate to one's role in a given situation and does not require acting out of any particular motivation. This fits Nivison's hypothesis, because if righteousness does not require acting out of any particular motivation, it is easier to imagine how we might simply become righteous through a mere commitment to acting righteously. However, I do not want to commit myself to the claim that Gaozi eschewed all ethical cultivation techniques in favor of a simple act of choice. The issue dividing Gaozi and Xunzi is simply the degree of recalcitrance of human nature to ethical cultivation.

into two types: “inner-directed” and “outer-directed.” Inner-directed cultivation involves a turning of mental focus inward. Outer-directed cultivation involves turning one’s mental focus to external situations, individuals, and texts. The lines between these kinds of cultivation are not sharp. If passive cultivation is to be effective, the subject of the cultivation must take an active role in responding appropriately to the environment provided. In addition, outer-directed cultivation involves inward processing of what is experienced as external.

#### IV.A. Passive Cultivation

The story of Ox Mountain raises the issue of what sorts of things “fetter and destroy” a person’s potential for virtue so that one comes to seem like a “bird or beast” rather than a human. Mengzi stresses conditions directly related to physical well-being. He thinks that these conditions are not absolutely necessary to realize one’s nature (some heroic individuals rise above injurious conditions), but most people will be impeded from realizing their nature without them:

To lack a constant livelihood, yet to have a constant heart – only a scholar is capable of this. As for the people, if they lack a constant livelihood, it follows that they will lack a constant heart. And if one simply fails to have a constant heart, dissipation and evil will not be avoided. When they thereupon sink into crime, to go and punish them is to trap the people. When there are benevolent people in positions of authority, how is it possible to trap the people? For this reason, an enlightened ruler, in regulating the people’s livelihood, must ensure that it is sufficient, on the one hand, to serve one’s father and mother, and on the other hand, to nurture wife and children. In good years, one is always full. In years of famine, one escapes death. Only then do they rush toward the good, and thus the people follow the ruler easily. (1A7.20–21)

Violence also stunts the growth of one’s virtuous nature, breeding indifference to the suffering of others (7B1) and leading to further violence (7B7). Consequently, although Mengzi recognizes that war may sometimes be necessary, he stresses that the only legitimate reason for war is to free commoners from the rule of a tyrant (7B4).

Mengzi clearly holds that a person’s cultural and educational environment can influence ethical development:

It is the way of people that if they are full of food, have warm clothes, and live in comfort, but are without instruction, then they come close to being animals. Sage King Shun was anxious about this too, so he instructed Xie

to be Minister of Instruction, and instruct them about human relations: the relation of father and children is one of love, ruler and minister is one of righteousness, husband and wife is one of distinction, elder and younger is one of precedence, and that between friends is one of faithfulness. (3A4.8)

It is not clear to what extent Mengzi envisions such education as involving children, as opposed to adults. It is interesting that there is a paucity of discussion of childhood education and conditioning in the *Mengzi*.<sup>40</sup> Childhood experience is stressed as a crucial factor in character formation by both Plato and Aristotle, as well as by modern developmental psychologists of various persuasions. Contemporary psychologist David T. Lykken, in describing the causes of antisocial personality disorder, remarks,

The absence of a nurturant parent during a critical period may prevent the development of the normal capacity for love and attachment that, as social animals, we all presumably possess. We know that children whose innate proclivity for language is not developed during the early years may never learn to speak and it seems likely that our native affiliative tendencies also require stimulation and reinforcement early in childhood. There are children who seldom or never have nurturant, loving, or happy interactions with other human beings or whose approaches to their parents are unpredictably punished so that they become extinguished. Such a child will not develop the prosocial components of socialization and their inability to relate emotionally to other people makes his or her adult adjustment problematic.<sup>41</sup>

This sounds similar to Mengzi's Ox Mountain parable, in that a stunting of emotional growth is caused by adverse environmental factors. In addition, as David Wong points out, there are Ruist texts that suggest the importance of childhood nurturing in the family for ethical development.<sup>42</sup> However, Mengzi himself does not seem to stress the importance of childhood itself as a unique, irreplaceable opportunity for ensuring the growth and continued existence of our sprouts. In other words, although Mengzi stresses the importance of environmental factors, he seems more interested in the influence of environment on adults than he does in its influence on children. But if Lykken and Wong are correct, an extremely

<sup>40</sup> A possible exception is 4A18, in which Mengzi suggests that fathers should not educate their own sons but rather turn the task over to someone else, lest the need to correct and reprimand lead to bitterness between the two. But it is not clear how young the sons in this passage are.

<sup>41</sup> Lykken, *Antisocial Personalities*, p. 26.

<sup>42</sup> Wong, "Universalism vs. Love with Distinctions."

bad childhood environment may make it difficult (if not impossible) for a person to be virtuous in his or her adult life.

In any case, Mengzi certainly does believe in the importance of ethical education for both adult commoners and rulers:

Do not be surprised at the King's failure to be wise. Even though it may be the easiest growing thing in the world, if it gets one day of warmth and ten days of frost, there has never been anything that is capable of growing. It is seldom that I have an audience with the King, and when I withdraw, those who "freeze" him come. What can I do with the sprouts that are there? (6A9)

In summary, Mengzi emphasizes the importance for ethical development of an environment that meets people's basic material needs, is free from the threat of violence, and provides ethical education. He may also recognize the importance of providing children with an environment that is loving (to stimulate the development of benevolence) but with clear boundaries (to stimulate the development of righteousness), but this is less clear. We might describe the influence of environment on a person's ethical development as the "passive aspect of ethical cultivation," since it is something that is done or happens *to* a person. But Mengzi also stresses what we might describe as the "active aspect of ethical cultivation," or "self-cultivation."<sup>43</sup>

#### IV.B. Active Self-Cultivation

##### *IV.B.1. Inner-Directed*

In the following passage, Mengzi uses a craft metaphor to make clear the need for active *self*-cultivation (in addition to the external factors that assist ethical growth):

Now, *go* is an insignificant craft. But if one does not focus one's heart and apply one's resolution, then one won't get it. 'Go Qiu' was the best at *go* throughout the world. Suppose you told Go Qiu to teach two people *go*, and one focuses his heart and applies his resolution to it, listening only to *Go*

<sup>43</sup>As I noted at the beginning of this section, active cultivation and passive cultivation are not categorically distinct. For example, teaching involves passive cultivation, because the teacher does things to the student such as establishing the curriculum of study and directing the process of education. However, in order to be effective, the student must take an active part in education, doing such things as thinking about what he is being taught (*Analects* 2.15, discussed in Chapter 2, §II.D), determining what he does not understand or is perplexed by, asking questions, and of course applying what he has learned to his own life.

Qiu. The other, although he listens to him, with his whole heart thinks about the coming of swans, longing to draw his bow and shoot them. Although he studies together with the other person, he will not be as good as he. Will this be because his intelligence is not as great? I answer that it is not. (6A9)

This passage stresses that focus on the task of self-cultivation is required. The following passage helps clarify what *kind* of mental focus is required:

It is not the office of the ears and eyes to concentrate (sī 思), and they are misled by things. Things interact with things and simply lead them along. But the office of the heart is to concentrate. If it concentrates then it will get [virtue]. If it does not concentrate, then it will not get it. This is what Heaven has given us. If one first takes one's stand on what is greater, then what is lesser will not be able to snatch it away. This is [how to] become a great person. (6A15)

Here we find another Mengzian use of metonymy, in which the “ears and eyes” stand for the desires of the various sense organs. These sensual desires are described as being passive and automatic, in that material objects of desire “simply lead them along,” without the need for any human agency. In contrast, the heart can either perform its function of engaging in sī 思 “concentration” or not. If it does concentrate, it will obtain virtue. Part of the activity of *si* is presumably restraining or redirecting the sensual desires when they might be “misled” by tempting but inappropriate objects of desire. (This keeps “things” from “leading our senses along” when they should not do so.) For example, suppose I am tempted to steal someone's iPod®. I should make an effort to concentrate on the fact that it is shameful to be someone who pilfers (righteousness), and to focus on the suffering that will be inflicted on the person from whom I would be stealing (benevolence). At the same time, I should avoid dwelling on the pleasures that the iPod® would give me. The sensual desires are, therefore, a major source of wrongdoing. But, as I noted earlier, Mengzi is not an ascetic: he states that the enjoyment of music, ritual hunting (1B1), wealth, and sex (1B5) are all legitimate, so long as they are done in an ethical manner.

So *si* directs the mind away from sensual objects when these are inappropriate. But what does it direct the mind *toward*? Both 6A6 and 6A15 suggest a connection between *si* and the sprouts. Passage 6A6 introduces the topic of *si* right after discussing the sprouts, and 6A15 connects *si* to “the greater part of oneself” (which is presumably the sprouts as opposed to the sensual desires). So what sort of mental activity is *si* precisely? As we have seen, Mengzi's technical philosophical vocabulary consists of terms

either based on metaphors drawn from everyday experience, or used in senses slightly refined from ordinary usage. *Si* is not an exception. One common use of *si* is illustrated in the very first of the *Odes*, where it says of a gentleman in love with his bride-to-be that “Day and night, he longed for her in his bosom,” where “longs for” is *si*. Similarly, *Analects* 9.30 cites an ode that says “How could it be that I do not long for you? It is just that your home is far away.”<sup>44</sup> But *si* can also refer to a more cognitive mental activity. Thus, in *Analects* 2.15 (discussed in Chapter 2, §II.D), we find “To learn without thinking will lead to confusion. To think without learning, however, will lead to fruitless exhaustion.” And we find *si* used in both the first and the second sense in the following passage from the *Mengzi* itself:

The Duke of Zhou longed to (*si*) unite the excellences of the three dynasties in order to bestow upon the people the policies of the four sage kings. If he encountered anything that was not consistent [among the policies of the sages], he would raise his head and concentrate upon it (*si*), from the day into the night. When he was fortunate enough to understand it, he would sit and await the dawn. (4B20)

Given that it has both an affective and a cognitive component, it seems likely that to *si* the sprouts is to focus one’s attention on the sprouts in a way that involves longing for their proper development. This understanding of *si* helps make sense of the following passage:

The core of benevolence is serving one’s parents. The core of righteousness is obeying one’s elder brother. The core of wisdom is knowing these two and not abandoning them. The core of ritual is to regulate and adorn these two. The core of music is to delight in these two.

If one delights in them, then they grow. If they grow, then how can they be stopped? If they cannot be stopped, then one does not notice one’s feet dancing to them, one’s hands swaying to them. (4A27)<sup>45</sup>

To *si* the sprouts involves delighting in their operation. *Mengzi* 4A27 informs us that this delight causes the sprouts to grow. Consequently, the heart will “get” virtue through self-aware virtuous activity.

Helping a person to positively focus his attention on the sprouts seems to be part of what Mengzi is doing in his famous dialogue with King Xuan of Qi in *Mengzi* 1A7.4–12. In this passage, we learn that King Xuan had spared an ox that was being led to slaughter, supposedly because he felt

<sup>44</sup> See *Mengzi* 3A5 (quoted and discussed in §VI.B) for a use of *si* in the same sense.

<sup>45</sup> Nivison, “Motivation and Moral Action in Mencius,” pp. 105–6, reads 4A27 similarly to the way I do.



sorry for it. Mengzi tells the king that his ability to feel compassion for the ox shows that he is capable of genuine Virtue and of becoming a true king. All that is needed is for the king to “extend his kindness” (tuī ēn 推恩) from the ox to his people. Through his dialogue with the king, Mengzi helps him to recognize several things: that he had compassion for the suffering of the ox, that this capacity for compassion is a good thing, and that the capacity would (if properly developed) allow him to become a true king.

Also relevant to understanding Mengzi’s “inner-directed” cultivation is recent research by Harold Roth on ancient Chinese “mystical praxis.” There is textual evidence for the early Chinese practice of seated meditation in conjunction with breath control and mental focus (similar to *zazen* in the Buddhist tradition). The fourth-century B.C.E. essay “Inward Training” (of the *Guanzi*) says of the “quintessence” of the qì 氣,

Floodlike, it harmonizes and equalizes  
And we take it to be the fount of the *qi*.  
When the fount is not dried up,  
The four limbs are firm.  
When the spring is not drained,  
It freely circulates through the nine apertures.  
You can then exhaust the Heavens and the earth  
And spread over the four seas.<sup>46</sup>

This cannot but remind us of Mengzi’s enigmatic pronouncement,

I am good at cultivating my floodlike *qi*. . . It is a *qi* that is supremely great and supremely unyielding. If one cultivates it with uprightness and does not harm it, it will fill up the space between Heaven and Earth. It is a *qi* that unites righteousness with the Way. Without these, it starves. It is produced by accumulated righteousness. It cannot be obtained by a seizure of righteousness. If some of one’s actions leave one’s heart unsatisfied, it will starve. Consequently, I say that Gaozi never understood righteousness, because he regarded it as external. (2A2.11–15)

Graham sees similarities like this as evidence that the teachings and practices of “Inward Training” would be shared by early Ruists like Mengzi. However, I think Roth is correct in arguing that the goal of Mengzian cultivation is completely at odds with the goal of meditative practice as suggested by “Inward Training” and other texts that were later classified as “Daoist,” such as the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi*. For the latter texts,

<sup>46</sup> *Guanzi* 49, “Inward Training.” Translation modified from Roth, *Original Tao*, p. 74. Cf. Graham, *Disputers*, p. 103.

the goal is to empty one's mind of everything, so that one is receptive to the promptings of the impersonal *qi*. As Zhuangzi puts it,

Do not listen with your ears but listen with your heart. Do not listen with your heart but listen with your *qi*. Listening stops with the ear. The mind stops with signs. *Qi* is empty and waits on external things. Only the Way gathers in emptiness. Emptiness is the fasting of the mind.

So, whereas Mengzi tells us to cultivate our hearts, texts in the "Inward Training" tradition tell us to "empty" our hearts.<sup>47</sup>

Nonetheless, Mengzi's discussion of cultivating his "floodlike *qi*" does suggest some connection between early meditative practices and his theory of self-cultivation. At the very least, it is not inconsistent with Mengzi's position to see value in seated meditation, breath control, and mental focus as techniques for helping to dissipate emotions that are inappropriate or excessive. For example, misdirected or excessive anger that blocks the growth or functioning of benevolent inclinations could be reduced or even eliminated by proper meditative practice.

#### *IV.B.2. Outer-Directed*

*Mengzi* 1A7 also helps illustrate the "outer-directed" aspects of ethical cultivation. Mengzi holds that there is a way of focusing one's mind on external situations that allows one to come to both see them more clearly and (we might say) "feel them more clearly." The details of how Mengzi thinks this works have been much discussed in recent literature since David Nivison raised the question in some classic papers.<sup>48</sup> Nivison was particularly intrigued by *Mengzi* 1A7.4–12. How, Nivison wondered, is the king supposed to "extend his kindness" from the ox to his subjects? Nivison noted that Mengzian extension challenges a view that had become common in the West. Many modern Western philosophers had followed Kant in holding that we are not ethically responsible for how we *feel*. We may be ethically evaluated, such philosophers would say, for our reasons and intentions in acting, but not for our emotions. In contrast, Mengzi thinks that we are responsible for the "management of our moral motivations." But how could this be? Or how could Mengzi have thought

<sup>47</sup> *Zhuangzi* 4, "The Human Realm." Translation modified from *Readings*, p. 228. For Graham's views on "Inward Training," see *Disputers*, pp. 100–5. For Roth's reply, see *Original Tao*, pp. 30–33. Roth sees a further similarity between "Inward Training" and *Mengzi* 2A2.16: *Original Tao*, p. 219n28. For an interpretation that sees 2A2 as more "outer-directed," see Ivanhoe, *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation*, pp. 20–21.

<sup>48</sup> Nivison, "Mencius and Motivation," and idem, "Motivation and Moral Action in Mencius."

it could be? I cannot just *decide* how to feel. (If I could, the Mohists would presumably be right about there being no human nature.)

Mengzi uses several terms for “extension,” including *tuī* 推, *dá* 達 (7B31), *kuò ér chōng* 擴而充 (2A6), and *jí* 及 (1A7.12). The notion of extension is tied to Mengzi’s view that humans have “sprouts” of virtues – innate but incipient tendencies toward virtue. The process of extension is sketched in 7B31:

People all have things that they will not bear. To extend [this reaction] to that which they will bear is benevolence. People all have things that they will not do. To extend [this reaction] to that which they will do is righteousness.

Zhu Xi explicates this, quite plausibly I think, by saying, “Humans all have the hearts of compassion and disdain. Hence, no one does not have things that they will not bear, and will not do. These are the tips of benevolence and righteousness. Nonetheless . . . there may be other circumstances in which they are unable [to have these reactions]. But if they extend (*tuī*) what they are able to do till it reaches (*da*) to what they were unable to do, then there will be nothing in which they are not benevolent and righteous.”<sup>49</sup> The passage from Mengzi continues by giving concrete examples:

If people can fill out (*chōng*) the heart that does not desire to harm others, their benevolence will be inexhaustible. If people can fill out the heart that will not trespass,<sup>50</sup> their righteousness will be inexhaustible. If people can fill out the core reaction<sup>51</sup> of not accepting being addressed disrespectfully, there will be nowhere they go where they do not do what is righteous. If a scholar may not speak and speaks, this is flattering by speaking. If one should speak but does not speak, this is flattering by not speaking.<sup>52</sup> These are both in the category (*lèi* 類) of trespassing.

So both regarding it as shameful to trespass on your neighbor’s property and objecting to being addressed disrespectfully are manifestations of the sprout of righteousness. Similarly, the desire we have, in at least some

<sup>49</sup> Zhu Xi, *Sishu jizhu*, commentary on 7B31.

<sup>50</sup> Literally: “If people can fill out the heart that will not bore through or jump over [a wall].” Zhu Xi suggests that “these are both the activities of thieves.” (Cf. *Analects* 17:12.) But it is also possible that what Mengzi has in mind is boring through or jumping over a wall in order to carry out an illicit assignation or elopement. (Cf. *Mengzi* 3B3.)

<sup>51</sup> Cf. the use of “core reaction” (*shí* 實) in 4A27 (discussed earlier in §IV.B.1).

<sup>52</sup> Compare *Analects* 15:8. Normally, *bù kě yǐ* 不可以 has the sense of “should not,” and *kě yǐ* 可以 has the sense of “can” or “may.” So one might translate this sentence, “If one may speak, but does not speak. . . .” However, sometimes (as here) *keyi* seems to require the stronger sense of “should” or “ought to.” (Cf. the use in *Xunzi* 22, HY 85/22/60.)

circumstances, to not harm others is a manifestation of the sprout of benevolence.

However, since the sprouts are only incipient virtues, there will be other situations in which uncultivated individuals *should* manifest benevolence or righteousness but do not. It is significant that Mengzi uses the word “category” here, since it makes clear that there is some relevant similarity between the situations in which one should manifest a given virtue. These similarities may not always be evident. At first glance, the case of an advisor to a ruler who keeps silent when he should object to the ruler’s actions seems to be very different from the case of a person who trespasses on his neighbor’s property for some illicit purpose. But Mengzi says that they are in fact the same kind of action for ethical purposes: both are failures of righteousness. Part of the task of extension is coming to recognize this similarity.

But extension is not merely a cognitive process of recognizing the relevant ethical similarities between actions or situations. Mengzi also stresses the importance of correct emotion or feeling. He expresses this in a very compact manner in 4B19, where he says that Sage King Shun “*acted out of* benevolence and righteousness. He did not *act out* benevolence and righteousness.” Zhu Xi explains this well: “To act out of benevolence and righteousness, not act out benevolence and righteousness, is when, having benevolence and righteousness already based in one’s heart, all that one does comes from them. It is not that one regards benevolence and righteousness as attractive and only then forces oneself to act.”<sup>53</sup>

So Mengzian extension has, at least conceptually, two aspects, which we might label “cognitive extension” and “affective extension.” Cognitive extension is coming to see the ethically relevant similarities (or differences) between two actions, individuals, or situations. Affective extension is coming to have the motivations and emotions that are appropriate in response to two actions, individuals, or situations. It seems clear that, at least for expository purposes, we can distinguish these two aspects. On the one hand, Mengzi talks about motivations and emotions; he thinks that any normal human has some of the right motivations and emotions already, but he thinks that we (unless and until we become a sage) must come to have motivations and emotional reactions in response to actions, individuals, and situations where we do not currently have them. This process is affective extension. On the other hand, Mengzi clearly also thinks that there are ethically relevant similarities between

<sup>53</sup> Zhu Xi, *Sishu jizhu*, commentary on 4B19.

the actions, individuals, and situations in question. We recognize, if we are a normal human, that some things are shameful and that compassion is an appropriate reaction to some things. But there are other things that *are* of the same kind as these things, but that we do not recognize are of the same kind. Now, when extension is *complete*, one's affective and cognitive reactions will be in perfect alignment. The difficult question, which has engaged interpreters since it was first brought to prominence in Anglophone research by Nivison, is how the affective and cognitive aspects are related in the *process* of extension.

Eric Hutton has observed that passage 3A5 places significant constraints on how extension can function. In this passage, Mengzi criticizes the later Mohist philosopher, Yi Zhi, who (in distinction from the early Mohists whom we examined in Chapter 3, §V.F) acknowledges that humans have an innate disposition to love their kin more than others. However, Yi Zhi suggests that, using Mohist agent-neutral consequentialism as our justification and guide, we should redirect our love for kin so that it extends to everyone equally. We'll examine Mengzi's response in detail later (§VI.B), but one key point is that Mengzi rejects Yi Zhi's position because it advocates reshaping our innate emotional responses in accordance with a standard that is alien to them. Thus, as Hutton points out, 3A5 seems to commit Mengzi to the principle that ethical "doctrine – and by extension, rational reflection generally – ought not to be allowed to outrun our natural moral impulses." In other words, we must avoid, Mengzi thinks, any ethical approach that "divorces moral motivation from the content of moral obligation and stretches the former to fit the latter."<sup>54</sup> This entails that, however cognitive extension functions, it must permit affective extension to follow a course of development that is, in some sense that we have yet to spell out, natural for it.

One might wonder, at this point, whether cognitive extension has any role to play at all in guiding affective extension. Perhaps the two always occur together, or perhaps affective extension can guide cognitive extension, but not the other way around. I think we must acknowledge that, for Mengzi, cognitive extension can guide affective extension. We can see this by examining a sample of Mengzian ethical reasoning.

We see Mengzi engaging in didactic ethical dialogues with other individuals in a number of passages. Each of these could, in principle, correspond to a sort of ethical soliloquy. In other words, Mengzi's dialogues

<sup>54</sup>Hutton, "Moral Connoisseurship in Mengzi," p. 176.

with others model for us examples of what he takes ethical reasoning to be. Consider 5A2 as an example:

Wan Zhang asked, "The *Odes* say,

How should one proceed in taking a wife?

One must inform one's parents.

If this saying is trustworthy, it seems that no one would follow it more than the sage Shun. How is it that Shun took a wife without informing them?"

Mengzi said, "If he had informed them he would have been unable to take a wife."

As the passage explains later on, Shun's parents were abusive of him and wished to take his property from him. They would have opposed his marriage out of ill will and perhaps also so that Shun would have neither wife nor children to inherit his property. Mengzi continues,

"For a man and a woman to dwell together in one home is the greatest of human relations. If he had informed them, he would be abandoning the greatest of human relations, which would have caused resentment toward his parents. Because of this he did not inform them."

Wan Zhang said, "I have now received your instruction regarding Shun's taking a wife without informing his parents. But how is it that the Emperor gave his daughter to Shun as a wife and did not inform them?"

Mengzi said, "The Emperor knew too that if he informed them he would not be able to give his daughter to him as a wife."

This is a simple case, but precisely because of that it is a good example to use to get clear about how ethical reasoning works according to Mengzi.

Wan Zhang is puzzled by the tension between an ethical precept that is validated by the *Odes* and an action by Sage King Shun, who is a paragon of virtue. Presumably, Wan Zhang both accepts the precept himself and also has the appropriate feelings about it in most situations: he rejoices in the thought of reporting to his parents his desire to marry, and he regards as shameful the prospect of eloping. He also agrees with the judgment that Shun was paradigmatically virtuous in all that he did, and he has feelings of admiration for Shun. So, when confronted with the tension between the precept and Shun's actions, he is perplexed. Perhaps he assumes that there must be some good explanation for Shun's actions. But this does not, by itself, relieve either his cognitive or his affective confusion. In short, he does not know how to extend his current feelings and judgments to the new case. Consider an analogy. I have the utmost respect for and trust in a Mr. Li's good character, but I see a videotape that seems to show him assaulting someone to take their money. Even if I am certain, given my knowledge of Li's character, that he could not be mugging

someone, my feelings are confused. Should I be happy about what I see on the videotape? I can't be, because I lack an understanding of the situation that makes Li's actions seem admirable (or even acceptable). One might suggest that, if I really trust Li, I will be happy, or at least calm, in watching the video, even if I don't know what is going on. But this can't be the whole story of my emotional reaction. The uncertainty of not knowing what the correct interpretation is leaves me with an inescapable confusion. Perhaps, when I know what is really going on, I will be frightened because someone with lots of resources at his disposal is masquerading as my friend Li and trying to ruin his reputation. Perhaps I will be proud of my friend because Li is actually thwarting a robbery rather than committing one. Perhaps I will be deeply worried because Li has a brain tumor that is causing uncharacteristic, violent behavior.

Similarly, even if Wan Zhang has the utmost confidence in Shun's probity, his feelings cannot be wholly settled yet. What Mengzi does is to provide an explanation of why Shun's actions are ethical. Informing one's parents is, under normal circumstances, an obligation. However, in this case, following the precept would frustrate (permanently, given the character of Shun's parents) Shun's desire to have a wife. Having a wife is a central human relationship. Had this desire been frustrated, even the great Shun would have felt resentment toward his parents. In order to avoid such resentment, Shun had not (and should not have) informed his parents. I think Mengzi's interpretation is both comprehensible and plausible to most of us. In contemporary Western cultures as much as Mengzi's culture, parents expect to be informed about their children's wedding plans; they expect to be involved in the wedding ritual in some way; and we regard this as a legitimate expectation. However, we also recognize that there are extenuating circumstances in which this normal expectation may legitimately be overridden, and that among these is a dysfunctional family of origin that would frustrate a reasonable desire to get married.<sup>55</sup> Precisely because Mengzi's ethical argument is so intuitive to us, we can focus less on reconstructing that argument and more on how this sample of reasoning fits into Mengzi's view of ethical cultivation.

Since the reasoning involved is so simple and straightforward, we may assume that Wan Zhang immediately understands and agrees with Mengzi's interpretation of the situation. At this point, he has achieved cognitive extension. He now knows *how* to apply the ethical "categories"

<sup>55</sup>To go from the sublime to the banal, such a situation is the theme of the Rod Stewart song, "Young Turks."

that he had before (e.g., Shun's action was *not* shameful) to Shun's situation. He understands *why* the categories do or do not apply (e.g., Shun's action is *not* shameful *because* it was the only way, in his particular context, to avoid certain bad results and achieve certain good consequences). And, I think, he has gotten better at the *skill* of extension: he is getting better at the habits of mind involved in thinking about complex ethical situations.

It is important to recognize what has *not* happened to Wan Zhang. Wan Zhang has not learned an *inviolable* and *substantive* rule that he can apply to future cases. (Wan Zhang's ethical education is particularist, rather than generalist.) What general rule could he possibly abstract from the case in question? (1) Is the rule, "Inform your parents of your wedding plans, unless doing so will prevent you from getting married"? But this is not an inviolable rule. What if I have poor judgment and am prone to impetuously getting into relationships with partners who are abusive? If that is so, perhaps my parents *should* prevent me from getting married in some cases. In a contemporary Western society, it may be hard to imagine how they could legitimately do so, but they may simply talk me out of it, or apply some kinds of reasonable social pressure, such as refusing to keep paying for my apartment. If I am really engaging in self-destructive behavior by getting married, this may be a perfectly legitimate way of "creating consequences" (to use the jargon of modern counseling). So this first effort at formulating a rule based on Shun's situation gives what is perhaps a useful rule of thumb, but not a categorical principle. (2) But Shun's parents were abusive. Perhaps the rule Wan Zhang should generalize to is, "Inform your parents of your wedding plans, unless they will prevent you from doing so simply because they are abusive"? But this is not an inviolable rule either. There may be *other* reasons for not informing your parents, besides the fact that they are abusive. Perhaps a soldier is suddenly called up to active duty and wants to marry her fiancé before heading off to the combat zone. Her parents are emotional and sensitive people who will be hurt if they are not present at the wedding, but there is no time to invite them before she ships out. So she marries her fiancé, vowing that they will have a regular wedding and invite her parents after she returns from her tour of duty.<sup>56</sup> (3) Perhaps we simply need to switch to the contrapositive formulation, though: "If your parents

<sup>56</sup>Needless to say, if her parents are so sensitive, it would not be wise to explain the circumstances to them since that will involve reminding them of *why* she does not want to wait until after she gets back to get married. (She may *not* come back.)



would prevent your wedding simply because they are abusive, you should not inform them of it.” This is *perhaps* an inviolable rule.<sup>57</sup> But how do we follow it? “Abusive” is a fuzzy term. There are certainly cases in which parents are so intensively abusive that it is obviously best to avoid informing them. If our parents are dangerously violent, we know the if-clause of the rule is triggered. (And Shun’s parents did try to murder him.) But most parent-child relationships are complex, having both good and bad aspects. A parent may be abusive by being cold and inexpressive of affection most of the time. But for some parents who are like this, weddings are one of the few times they will express affection. Another parent may give a child low self-esteem (perhaps simply by infecting her child with her own self-doubt). But she may be an exemplary parent in other respects. In either of these two cases, inviting the parent may be in everyone’s best interests. Perhaps further fine-tuning of the rule will give us something that is more than a rule of thumb. But I doubt it. And I do not think Mengzi expected Wan Zhang to come up with any such categorical rule. In summary, *cognitive extension* is not a process of coming to generalize to an inviolable rule, which we then apply to further cases. Rather, it is developing a *skill* at thinking about the similarities and differences between ethical cases.

How does all this relate to Wan Zhang’s *affective* extension? As Hutton points out, we must (if we want to avoid saddling Mengzi with the sort of “two source” view that he rejects in 3A5) avoid saying that these cognitive judgments and skills fundamentally reshape or redirect Wan Zhang’s original affective reactions. But what alternative is there?

David Wong has offered a thoughtful interpretation of how cognitive extension might guide affective extension. Generally speaking, there is a connection between some ethical feelings, such as compassion and shame, and certain beliefs, without which the feelings would seem inappropriate. It is this connection that allows cognitive extension to nurture affective extension without fundamentally reshaping it. Two examples of ethical growth will help illustrate this. Suppose that you feel compassion for animals that do not receive adequate medical treatment. As a result, you feel sad when you see cases of animal neglect on TV, you make sure that your own pets are well cared for, and you donate a bit of money to animal assistance programs. In addition, since you feel compassion for neglected animals, you think that those animals are suffering, that their

<sup>57</sup>I can actually think of some cases in which the rule would not hold, but they are far-fetched. In the spirit of Mengzian ethics, I would like to stick to realistic examples.

suffering is not deserved, and that it would be better if they weren't suffering. Now, suppose further that you were indifferent toward or unaware of the situation of other *humans* who suffer because they do not receive adequate medical treatment. I point out to you that many people in our society do suffer because of the lack of adequate medical care, that most of them have not (in any plausible sense) done anything to deserve being in this situation, and that it would be better if they weren't suffering. If you come to share these beliefs, and if you keep your mind focused on them, we would expect that you would start to have compassion for people who do not receive adequate medical care. You would not be forcing yourself to have these feelings simply because you had logically deduced that you ought to have them. Rather, understanding the relevant similarity naturally nurtures the feelings so that you start to have them in the new situation as well.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, if you claimed to see the relevant similarity, yet failed to ever extend the feelings to other people, we would doubt that you *really* saw it. You already felt bad about a living thing *because* it was ill or injured and not receiving medical care. All that I have done is to help those feelings "flow" into a new situation that is like the previous one in all relevant respects.

Consider another example. You feel shame about having racial prejudices. As a result, you feel bad when you catch yourself thinking, saying, or doing things that spring from such prejudices. You try to become aware of your own prejudices and to uproot them. In addition, since you feel this shame, you believe that you have racial prejudices (i.e., you judge people negatively because of their race), that there is no good reason for thinking that someone is a bad person because of their race, and that others would be entitled to look down on you for having such prejudices. Now, suppose that you are not ashamed of your own *religious* prejudices.<sup>59</sup> I point out to you that you tend to judge people negatively

<sup>58</sup> Wong uses the term "crystallize" to describe this process (Wong, "Reasons and Analogical Reasoning in Mengzi," pp. 193, 199). This is an attractive term. However, I have used the term "nurture," and contrasted it with "reshape," because these are Mengzi's own favored metaphors. Recall again the importance for Mengzi of a developmental conception of human nature. We are nurturing a process of growth that results in the healthy, mature form of a thing. He contrasts this with reshaping (literally, "carving up," 6A1), which destroys the original nature.

<sup>59</sup> This is often a problem in ways that are not recognized among contemporary intellectuals. On secular campuses, Christians and their beliefs are often stereotyped, mocked and denigrated in ways that would be considered outrageous if the subject were non-Christians or cultural differences associated with race. And it is still often true that "anti-Catholicism is the intellectual's anti-semitism."

based on their religion, and that there is really no correlation between religious persuasion, *per se*, and being a good or bad person. If you come to share these beliefs, and you keep your mind “focused” on them, you would naturally come to feel ashamed of your religious prejudices in the same way that you have been ashamed of your racial prejudices.

In these first two cases, the beliefs that corresponded to the emotions are already fairly clear to the agent at the beginning of the process of cultivation. (It seems almost needless to point out that someone who feels compassion for suffering animals thinks that “it would be better if they were not suffering.”) However, there could also be cases in which the beliefs were unclear. (One might analyze this in a variety of ways. We might say that the agent holds the relevant beliefs, but that they are subconscious. We might say that the agent need not have the beliefs, but rejection of the relevant beliefs seems to render at least some emotions inappropriate.) Suppose when I am young I live in a community in which my political views are unpopular. In this environment, I am routinely shouted down when I try to express them. Later, I become part of a different community in which my political views are in the majority. You notice that, in this community, I am now prone to shout down those who do not agree with the majority of which I am a part. I may even delight in the chance to take revenge on the other side. In order for me to grow ethically, you may try to help me understand my own original feelings better and focus on *some* of my feelings rather than others. In order to encourage this focus, you might prompt me with certain questions. What bothered me about being shouted down? Presumably, one factor is a feeling of having been ethically wronged. How? I regarded those who shouted me down as unfair, unkind, and base. They were unfair for preventing those with different opinions from expressing them just because they’re in the minority. They were unkind for not recognizing how this made their victims feel. It was base of them to react this way to dissent, and to enjoy doing so. In contrast, it would have been fair, generous, and noble of them to allow dissent. If I recognize (perhaps with your help) that these are (in some sense) my beliefs about the paradigm situation, and if I can focus on the fact that in my analogue situation I am doing just what I objected to ethically before, I should start to feel differently about my actions in the analogue situation. Note that, in this “ethical therapy,” there is an element of selective nurturing. Other emotions were also operative in my paradigm situation. I presumably felt anger about having my will thwarted. I may have felt a sense of humiliation at my powerlessness. I probably felt fear of repercussions. If

I focus on *these* emotions, I am more likely to continue shouting down dissent in the analogue situation.<sup>60</sup>

One might object that these accounts of ethical growth are too facile because many people will fail to extend their feelings in the situations described. But this is to miss the point of the examples. Mengzi, in common with every other serious ethical thinker, is well aware that efforts to ethically educate and cultivate frequently fail because they depend on the commitment of the subject of cultivation. You may fail to “focus on” the facts that I have brought to your attention. You may simply refuse to do so because recognizing those facts seems inconvenient for you. Or you may be assisted in this wilful ignorance by others who, for whatever personal or political reasons, attempt to distract you from these facts. So there is no guarantee that extension will occur. What the examples give us, though, is a model for extension that presents it as a process of nurturing existing dispositions rather than fundamentally reshaping them.

Another sort of objection is that Wong’s account is too rationalistic and essentially saddles Mengzi with a neo-Kantian view of ethics. Specifically, how does Wong’s interpretation differ from the following view (which would be more like a discovery model)? Our initial ethical intuitions about specific cases are taken as “given.” We discover what general principles our specific intuitions commit us to. Then we alter our specific ethical judgments so as to achieve consistency with these principles. Finally, our emotions (somewhat mysteriously) change so that they come into alignment with the general principles and our new specific judgments. There are a variety of problems with any view like this. As I have pointed out elsewhere, such a view seems to imply that we would be fully warranted in achieving ethical consistency by uprooting, rather than extending, our ethical inclinations.<sup>61</sup> But Wong distinguishes his position from this one in several ways. To begin with, Wong denies that the relevant beliefs are (normally) principles of perfect generality. Consider my example about overcoming religious prejudices: the premise that religious beliefs are not correlated with a person’s character is a good rule of thumb. However, it is not an invariant generalization. It would be foolish

<sup>60</sup> Compare Wong’s account of one’s reaction to a homeless person asking for change (Wong, “Reasons and Analogical Reasoning in Mengzi,” p. 193).

<sup>61</sup> See Kwong-loi Shun, “Moral Reasons in Confucian Ethics,” and Van Norden, “Kwong-loi Shun on Moral Reasons in Mencius.”

to deny that being a member of the Heaven's Gate cult was correlated with a variety of character flaws (most notably a lack of wisdom, in the Ruist sense).<sup>62</sup> Similarly, compassion for the suffering of animals should make one do something such as donate money to animal charities. But this is not true if one is at a subsistence level of income oneself. Nor, I think, is it true that *all* animals deserve medical care. Wild animals should generally be left to live and die as nature and luck determines. (Again, even this is not an invariant generalization. What if the animal is a member of an endangered species? And there is nothing unethical, and much commendable, in taking pity on a suffering wild animal one encounters and deciding to help it, even if this would be foolish as a general policy.) In general, ethical cultivation for Mengzi is more like developing a skill than learning to apply an algorithm. A person who has acquired a skill – whether it is playing poker, boxing, appreciating fine art, or being ethical – first learned by following certain rules. But her skill, if it reaches a high level, transcends any simple rules and cannot be exhausted by even the most elaborate rules. Similarly, ethical extension for Mengzi cannot be reduced to the application of rules.

Although self-cultivation is important, one should not force oneself to do things for which one does not yet have the appropriate feelings. Mengzi explains that, if “some of one's actions leave one's heart unsatisfied,” one's ethical motivations will “starve.” Instead, one

must work at it, but do not aim at it directly. Let the heart not forget, but do not help it grow. Do not be like the man from Song. Among the people of the state of Song there was one who, concerned lest his grain not grow, pulled on them. Wearily, he returned home, and said to his family, “Today I am worn out. I helped the grain to grow.” His son rushed out and looked at them. The grain was withered. Those in the world who do not help the grain to grow are few. Those who abandon them, thinking it will not help, are those who do not weed their grain. Those who help them grow are those who pull on the grain. Not only does this not help, but it even harms them. (2A2.16)

In summary, Mengzi believes that humans have capacities to realize the virtues of benevolence, righteousness, wisdom, and propriety that can

<sup>62</sup> In 1997, thirty-nine members of the Heaven's Gate cult (led by Marshall Applewhite) committed mass suicide in a mansion in Rancho Santa Fe, California, because they believed that doing so would allow them to board a space ship that was arriving with the Hale-Bopp Comet. (Some group members had previously had themselves surgically castrated.)

and should be developed. Environmental factors, including ethical education and freedom from deprivation and violence, make it easier to realize one's nature. Furthermore, the full development of one's nature requires the active engagement of a person's "heart" (*xin*) in the process of learning, involving both introspection and study – ideally under the guidance of a wise teacher.

## V. MENGZI ON THE VIRTUES

Each of the Mengzian virtues is a disposition that involves appropriate perception, contemplation, feeling, motivation, and action. In other words, to fully have a given virtue, one must see the world in a particular way; one must properly process these perceptions through some kind of reflection (which may lead, in turn, to new perceptions); one must have certain emotional reactions to what one perceives; one must have motivations to act in certain ways; and one must act on at least some of one's motivations.

The link between perceptions and emotions is particularly important. Mengzi obviously thinks that certain facts about the world (or, at the very least, certain ways of seeing the world) demand of us that we feel certain ways. King Xuan feels sympathy for the ox being led to slaughter, and he *ought to feel* sympathy for the suffering of his own people (1A7). If we were begging, we would be ashamed to accept a handout given with contempt, and we *should feel* ashamed about selling out for a huge salary (6A10). We can see, then, that Mengzi's view seems to require at least a minimally cognitive view of the emotions.<sup>63</sup> I mean by this that Mengzi thinks emotional reactions can be "appropriate" or "inappropriate" (or "rational"/"irrational" or "warranted"/"unwarranted," or "justified"/"unjustified" – use whichever set of terms offends your sensibilities the least).

Generally speaking, emotional reactions can be appropriate or inappropriate in at least two ways. For example, my fear of flying in airplanes is irrational (unwarranted, unjustified) in two ways: both because I *believe* that flying is not particularly dangerous, and because my belief on this topic is itself *warranted*. On the other hand, if a teenager believes that it is shameful that he was not chosen for an athletic team, then we should say

<sup>63</sup> There is an immense literature in recent philosophy on the nature of emotions, which I cannot summarize here. See, for example, Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Emotions*, Robert Solomon, *The Passions*, and Ronald de Sousa, *Rationality of Emotions*.

(I submit) that his feeling of shame is not *objectively* warranted because he is mistaken in thinking that such a thing is shameful. However, his feeling of shame is *subjectively* warranted because (unlike my fear of flying in airplanes) he holds beliefs that would warrant his feelings (if those beliefs were themselves justified). Furthermore, I assume that, because of these interesting connections between emotions and the beliefs that warrant them, the best methodology in trying to understand particular emotions is to begin with cases in which emotions are warranted (at least subjectively).

## V.A. Benevolence

### V.A.1. *Mengzi*

As we saw in Chapter 2 (§II.B), the *Analects* sometimes uses the term rén 仁 in a broad sense to refer to the summation of human virtues, and other times uses it in a narrow sense to refer to a specific virtue, which is characterized in one passage (12.22) as “loving others” (ài rén 愛人). We also saw that loving others for Ruists is an agent-relative obligation, in the sense that one should have greater affection for those “closer” to oneself, such as one’s parents, than for those “farther” from oneself, such as strangers. The Mohists adopt the narrower conception of benevolence, but it comes to mean something slightly different in their hands, because their love is impartial (as opposed to the differentiated love of the Ruists). Mengzi sometimes uses a formulation similar to that found in *Analects* 12.22: “The benevolent love others” (rén zhě ài rén 仁者愛人 4B28). However, perhaps because the Mohists had appropriated the term “love” (ài 愛), Mengzi generally prefers another set of terms to describe benevolence. Indeed, as Nivison observes, *Mengzi* 7A45 seems to be a swipe at the Mohists for confusing love with benevolence: “Gentlemen, in relation to animals, are sparing (*ai*) of them, but are not benevolent (*ren*) toward them. In relation to the people, they are benevolent toward them, but do not treat them as kin.”<sup>64</sup> In 2A6 and 6A6, Mengzi says that the emotion characteristic of benevolence is cèyīn 惻隱, which has been translated as “commiseration” (Legge), “distress” (Dobson), “sympathy” or “compassion” (Ware), and “compassion” (by Lau and by Hinton).<sup>65</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Nivison, “On Translating Mencius,” in *The Ways of Confucianism*, p. 197.

<sup>65</sup> In 2A6, Hinton renders *cèyīn* as “pity” in the expression chùtì cèyīn 怵惕惻隱 (“heart-stricken with pity”), but he then switches to “compassion” as a translation for *cèyīn* later in 2A6 and in 6A6. I am not sure why he does this.

This expression may be a binome proper, in which two words with the same or very similar meanings are combined. (I take this to be the case with the expression *xiū wù* 羞惡, which is the binome used to describe the emotion characteristic of righteousness, discussed later.) However, it may also be a verb-object construction since *ce* means “to grieve about” and *yin* can mean “suffering.” So *ceyin* would mean “grieving about the suffering of others.” This is certainly an important aspect of benevolence for Mengzi. The classic example of *ceyin* in 2A6 is the response of a person seeing a child about to fall into a well. (Note that benevolence can have as its object not just contemporary suffering, but can also be “forward-looking”: the child has not yet fallen into the well, but the prospect of this happening triggers the sprout of benevolence.) However, it seems clear that Mengzi also recognized a positive side to benevolence: delighting in the happiness of others. Thus, in 1B1, Mengzi encourages a ruler to “have the same delights as the people,” which means (as Zhu Xi explains in his commentary on this passage) “extending his fondness for happiness so as to put into effect benevolent government.”<sup>66</sup> In a later passage, Mengzi advises the ruler to “delight in the people’s delights” and “worry about the people’s worries” (1B4). Neither passage uses the term “benevolence” explicitly, but the ruler in each case is King Xuan of Qi, with whom Mengzi has the extensive discussion of benevolence in 1A7. So two of the “parts” of *ren* are grieving at the suffering of others and delighting in the happiness of others.

Benevolence operates on several different kinds of subjects. Mengzi is very much in line with the strand of Ruist thinking that sees benevolence as grounded in one’s affection for one’s parents. Just as Kongzi’s disciple Youzi is reported to have said, “Might we thus say that filiality and brotherly respect represent the root of benevolence?” (*Analects* 1.2), Mengzi said that

Among babes in arms there is none that does not know to love its parents. When they grow older, there is none that does not know to respect its elder brother. Treating one’s parents as parents is benevolence. Respecting one’s elders is righteousness. There is nothing else to do but extend these to the world. (7A15)

As Nivison hints, “extending” here is a reference to Mengzi’s doctrine of ethical extension from our sprouts: we begin with feelings of affection for our parents and then extend these outward so that they reach to

<sup>66</sup> Zhu Xi, *Sishu jizhu*, commentary on *Mengzi* 1B1.7.



everyone.<sup>67</sup> This passage identifies respect *for* one's elder brother as the basis for righteousness. Elsewhere, Mengzi identifies benevolence as the paradigmatic virtue that someone should manifest *as* elder brother: "Benevolent people, in relation to their younger brothers, do not store up anger, and do not dwell in resentment. They simply love and treat them as kin" (5A3).

The affection that extends outward from one's parents is like concentric waves that ripple out from a stone tossed into a pond. It is strongest near the center, and gradually weakens as it moves away. So our feelings and our ethical obligations are strongest for those "closest" to us (parents, close relatives), somewhat weaker for those more distant (friends, teachers), and weakest for complete strangers.

The fact that benevolence is weakest to strangers does not imply that a Ruist ruler would be indifferent or only minimally concerned with the well-being of his subjects. In fact, what makes one qualified to be king, according to the Ruists, is having such a wealth of benevolence that it extends to the entire populace.

In summary, Mengzian benevolence is a disposition toward agent-relative obligations involving the well-being of others. It has several parts or aspects. To be benevolent is to be pained by the suffering of others and to take joy in the happiness of others, whether the suffering or joy is contemporary or prospective. Benevolence requires differentiated love: one should have greater concern for kin than for friends, and greater concern for friends than for strangers. Nonetheless, a benevolent person will have some degree of concern for the well-being of anyone. This differentiated degree of concern mirrors differentiated ethical obligations: greatest for kin and less for complete strangers. The emotional and cognitive aspects of benevolence are closely intertwined. Benevolence involves an emotional response (such as sympathy) to the perception of a property (such as the suffering of another person). The benevolent person is disposed to notice such ethically relevant properties and to see the relevant similarities between otherwise different situations in which a benevolent response is called for. Fully developed benevolence frequently requires action. So although it shows the *sprout* of benevolence that one feels sympathy in response to the perception of the prospective suffering of a child about to fall into a well, the *completely benevolent* person will act appropriately in response to these feelings and perceptions.

<sup>67</sup> Nivison, "Motivation and Moral Action in Mencius," p. 101.

V.A.2. *Two Contrasts*

It may help clarify our understanding of Mengzian benevolence if we compare it with two other kinds of altruistic motivations: *agapê* or *caritas* (love, or “charity” as it is translated in the King James Bible) of the Thomistic Christian tradition and *ren* itself as it was understood by School of the Way Ruists (as represented by Wang Yangming). We shall see that these forms of altruism differ in terms of their “amplitude” at various “ranges” from the individual and in terms of their explanation for why altruism is warranted.

V.A.2.A. THOMISTIC CHRISTIANITY. The New Testament offers what seems, at first, to be a contradictory mix of views on altruism. At times, familial ties seem to be treated as an impediment to perfect virtue and salvation. Jesus announces,

For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes *shall be* they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. (Matthew 10:35–37 KJV)

In a similar vein, Jesus asks a man to become one of his followers, and the man replies, “suffer me first to go and bury my father.” Jesus says, “Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.” Another man asks to follow Jesus after he goes “bid them farewell, which are at home at my house.” Jesus responds, “No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”<sup>68</sup> Once, when Jesus was preaching, he was informed, “Behold, thy mother and thy brethren without seek for thee.” He replied, “Who is my mother, or my brethren?” Then, gesturing toward his disciples he said, “Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother.”<sup>69</sup> Ruists would be horrified by these statements, especially the command to ignore the burial of one’s own father! However, Jesus also repeatedly emphasizes the commandment of the Decalogue to “honour thy father and thy mother.”<sup>70</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Luke 9:59–62. (Cf. Matthew 8:21–22.)

<sup>69</sup> Mark 3:31–35. (Cf. Matthew 12:46–50.)

<sup>70</sup> Matthew 15:4, 19:19; Mark 7:10, 10:19; Luke 18:20. Cf. Exodus 20:12, Deuteronomy 5:16.

There are at least two ways of reconciling these injunctions. One is suggested by a story found in all three of the synoptic gospels. A man comes to Jesus and asks, “Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” Jesus answers, “Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother.” The man replies, “Master, all these have I observed from my youth.” The Gospel of Mark then says, “Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me.”<sup>71</sup> This is intriguing for a variety of reasons. Jesus seems to set up here a two-tiered set of ethical demands: a lesser (but still strenuous) set of demands (including honoring one’s father and mother) and a greater vocation. Notice that (at least in Mark’s version) Jesus looked on the man lovingly before explaining to him the greater demands. Of course, Jesus loves everyone. (It’s kind of his job.) But the fact that his love for this man is mentioned here suggests that Jesus wished to offer him a special vocation. For Christians in the Catholic tradition, the view suggested in this passage leads to a priesthood set apart from the laity by vows of celibacy and poverty. A second way to reconcile Jesus’ apparently divergent views on the family is to suggest that both are intended, but in different senses. One must, according to the Christian tradition, love God more than anything else – more than one’s own parents, spouse, or children. This does not entail that one should dishonor one’s family, or that one may not love them. But in the case of a conflict between one’s love for one’s family and one’s love for God, the latter should triumph. So, in some circumstances, the love of God *will* “set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother.”<sup>72</sup>

Aquinas develops this into a coherent, systematic philosophical position.<sup>73</sup> Aquinas holds that all “the other emotions of the soul are caused by love” (I-II, 27, 4). This makes sense because in his conceptual scheme *amor*, “love,” is appetite for what is perceived to be good. It is easy to miss how profound this simple statement is, and also how challenging it is to

<sup>71</sup> Mark 10:17–22. (Cf. Matthew 19:16–22; Luke 18:18–23.)

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Aquinas’s comments in *Summa* II-II, 25, 6.

<sup>73</sup> Needless to say, Aquinas is building on the thought of a broad range of previous philosophers and theologians, especially Plato (the notion of the ascent of the soul through love, as depicted in the *Symposium*, for example), Aristotle (including his general psychology of human motivation and his conception in *Nicomachean Ethics* Book ix, Chapter 4 of a friend as “another self”), and Augustine (who himself synthesized Platonism with Christianity).

many modern sensibilities. *Amor* is both broader and narrower than what we might call “love” in English. *Amor* covers almost anything we might label a “desire.” However, *amor* is more specific in its conceptual content than “love” or “desire” in English. A radical existentialist would say that what makes something good is that it is chosen freely. A psychological subjectivist would say that to be good is simply to be desired. But, for those in the Thomistic tradition, one desires things only because one perceives that they are good. This does not mean that one cannot choose badly. One can desire only what is good, but one may focus on an aspect of a thing’s goodness (e.g., how good a second dessert will taste) and ignore greater goods that are forfeited (e.g., physical health) (I-II, 27, 1, ad 1). Now, broadly speaking, one can love the good in two ways (I-II, 26, 4). One can love something in itself, or one can love a thing for the sake of another thing. For example, I love myself for my own sake, but I love moderate exercise because it is good for me. Similarly, I love my children for their own sakes, but I love it when they get a good education because that is for their good. One thing is good for another thing insofar as there is some union or likeness between them (I-II, 27, 3; I-II, 28, 1). For example, I want healthy food because I perceive that having it is part of my well-being. And I love a friend because I perceive that, in Aristotle’s terms, he is a second self. In other words, a true friend and I share things in common.

So far, Aquinas is following Aristotle fairly closely. For Aristotle, friendship, *philia*, can be maintained only among those who know each other well. *Philia* plays an important role in Aristotle’s thought, since it is what binds individuals together in the *polis* (city state), and it is what binds together Aristotle’s ideally virtuous people, who are otherwise completely independent.

Aquinas goes significantly beyond Aristotle, though, when he begins to discuss *caritas*, “charity.” Charity is the friendship of man for God (II-II, 23, 1).<sup>74</sup> Since the “ultimate and principal good of man is the enjoyment of God,” it is impossible to have perfect virtue without charity (II-II, 23, 7). However, Aquinas differs from Augustine in that Aquinas allows that an act can be good (although imperfectly so) even if it lacks charity, so long as it is directed at some genuine particular good (such as the

<sup>74</sup> Aristotle would regard the notion of friendship with a god as impossible since friends must have a life in common, and Aristotle conceives of God as unconcerned with human affairs. In contrast, Aquinas’s God creates the world with an ethical purpose and cares so much about humans that he becomes embodied (as Jesus) to make human salvation possible.

welfare of others). Aquinas agrees with Augustine, though, in holding that charity is not something that humans can achieve through their own efforts. It must be “infused” into humans through divine agency (II-II, 24, 2–3).

Although charity is friendship with God, it is central to Aquinas’s understanding of our concern for other humans. Aquinas’s comments on this point are worth quoting in detail:

Friendship extends to a person in two ways: first in respect of himself, and in this way friendship never extends but to one’s friends: secondly, it extends to someone in respect of another, as, when a man has friendship for a certain person, for his sake he loves all belonging to him, be they children, servants, or connected with him in any way. Indeed, so much do we love our friends, that for their sake we love all who belong to them, even if they hurt or hate us; so that, in this way, the friendship of charity extends even to our enemies, whom we love out of charity in relation to God, to Whom the friendship of charity is chiefly directed. (II-II, 23, 1, ad 2)

So our love for other humans is analogous to our love for our best friend’s children. This might make charity for others seem very bloodless and derivative: it is only because of our common relationship to God that we should have charity toward everyone. However, we can, if we try, see an aspect of God in any human, just as we can see aspects of our best friend in our best friend’s children. So, just as we love God, so we should love other humans.

Aquinas stresses that there is a proper “order” to our charity. We should love God above all else (II-II, 26, 1–3). Some might be surprised to learn that Aquinas thinks a person should love him or herself more than anything else besides God (II-II, 26, 4). (Aquinas does not regard this as inconsistent with ethics, because he thinks that ethics is what is really in human interest.) Interestingly, though, Aquinas claims that we should love our “neighbor” more than our own body (II-II, 26, 5). This is because a person is not identical with his body. However, Aquinas notes that “charity does not necessarily require a man to imperil his own body for his neighbor’s welfare, except in a case where he is under obligation to do so and if a man of his own accord offer himself for that purpose, this belongs to the perfection of charity” (II-II, 26, 5, ad 3).

In general, Aquinas’s conception of altruism differs from Mengzi’s in that, for Aquinas, concern for the well-being of other humans is grounded in our love of God. We love other people because we share with them a common relationship to God. Although Mengzi believes that each human’s nature is implanted in him by Heaven, he does not

justify our benevolence for other humans in terms of our sharing a common relationship with Heaven. (We do not have sympathy for others, on Mengzi's view, because we see Heaven in them, or because they too are children of Heaven.) In addition, Aquinas recognizes a higher vocation that one may be called to (the life of a celibate cleric), which devalues the ties of family. Mengzi would find the notion of celibacy abhorrent (as did the later School of the Way Ruists who criticized the Buddhists for having a celibate clergy). This difference is related to their different metaphysical assumptions. Mengzi's Heaven does not radically transcend the world in the way that Aquinas's God does. Consequently, Mengzi could see no justification for trying to lessen ties to our physical nature.

V.A.2.B. WANG YANGMING. Wang Yangming would later give a characterization of benevolence that is revealing of what is distinctive about Mengzi's conception of benevolence, and how it differs from that of his later School of the Way followers like Wang:

It is not only the great person who forms one body with Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things. Even the mind of the petty person is no different. Only he himself makes it petty. Therefore, when he sees a child fall into a well, he cannot help a "feeling of alarm and compassion (*ce yin*)."<sup>75</sup> This shows that his benevolence forms one body with the child (*shì qí rén yǔ rú zǐ ér wéi yì tǐ yě* 是其仁與孺子而為一體也). It may be objected that the child belongs to the same species (*lèi* 類). Again, when he observes the "frightened appearance" of birds and animals about to be slaughtered, he cannot help "feeling an inability to bear their suffering." This shows that his benevolence forms one body with birds and animals. It may be objected that birds and animals are sentient beings as he is. But when he sees plants broken and destroyed, he cannot help a feeling of pity. This shows that his benevolence forms one body with plants. It may be said that plants are living things as he is. Yet even when he sees tiles and stones shattered and crushed, he cannot help a feeling of regret. This shows that his benevolence forms one body with tiles and stones.<sup>75</sup>

This intriguing passage presents evidence that all humans have benevolence toward everything that exists. In addition, it offers an explanation for why this is so: one's "benevolence forms one body" with everything else.

Mengzi would certainly agree with Wang that humans manifest at least some compassion for all other humans. After all, Wang's example of

<sup>75</sup> Wang, "Inquiry on the Great Learning," in *Instructions for Practical Living*, pp. 659–60. Translation slightly modified.

seeing the child about to fall into a well, as well as the phrase “feeling of alarm and compassion,” are lifted from *Mengzi* 2A6. (Interestingly, though, Wang is guilty of a common misreading of Mengzi, for he changes Mengzi’s “*suddenly* see a child *about to* fall into a well” [zhà jiàn rúzi jiāng rù yú jǐng 乍見孺子將入於井] into “see a child fall into a well” [jiàn rúzi zhī rù jǐng 見孺子之入井]. But, as we saw earlier, every detail is important in Mengzi’s carefully chosen thought experiment.) Mengzi would also agree with Wang’s claim that (at least some) humans manifest compassion for the suffering of animals. In this case Wang’s example is drawn from 1A7.4–12, where King Xuan’s “inability to bear” the “frightened appearance” of an ox being led to slaughter is taken as a sign of his benevolence.

However, the explanation that Wang offers for these facts, “forming one body” with the child and the animals, is not a notion that Mengzi would recognize. In addition, it is unlikely that Mengzi would agree with Wang that the “petty person” would manifest compassion for animals. For Mengzi, King Xuan’s inability to bear the frightened appearance of the ox is a sign of an ethical sense that is, at least in some respects, highly developed. Mengzi compares what the king has done to feats like seeing the tip of an extremely fine hair, or lifting 200 lbs., which not everyone can do. This is quite in line with the metaphor I suggested earlier of benevolence being like ripples in water, which decrease in amplitude as they move outward. An ox is “far” from a parent, child, or unrelated fellow human. Consequently, feeling compassion for an ox is something that only the cultivated could do.<sup>76</sup> Thus, Mengzi remarks that, because of his highly refined sensibilities, “the gentleman keeps his distance from the kitchen.” Now, Mengzi never suggests that the practices of meat eating or animal sacrifice should be suspended. (Although meat has typically been a luxury good in China, vegetarianism as a choice was introduced to China by Buddhism, long after the time of Mengzi.) So Mengzi evidently expects that “petty people” will typically be indifferent to the suffering of animals. This is illustrated by the story of how the sage Zichan delighted in the happiness of a pet fish, whereas his servant – presumably a “petty person” – cooked and ate the fish (5A2, discussed later in §V.D).

<sup>76</sup>This seems implausible since people often are quicker to feel pity for suffering (non-human) animals than they are for other suffering humans. However, this is not a fundamental problem for Mengzi’s position, because his view is that the manifestations of the sprouts of virtue are haphazard at first and need to be cultivated so that they are consistently manifested.

Wang's next two examples stray even farther from Mengzi's worldview. Mengzi never suggests that humans have "pity" for plants that are "broken and destroyed."<sup>77</sup> Indeed, the particular term Wang uses for "pity" here, *mǐn xù* 憫恤, is not part of Mengzi's vocabulary.<sup>78</sup> The notion *was* quite familiar to School of the Way Ruists, though. Indeed, there is a famous story that Zhou Dunyi (teacher of the Cheng brothers, who developed the mature metaphysics of the School of the Way) refused to have his grass trimmed.<sup>79</sup> And I cannot imagine Mengzi being anything other than baffled by the suggestion that humans have "regret" when "tiles and stones are shattered and crushed."

So where does Wang, who sees himself as a faithful adherent of the Way of Kongzi and Mengzi, come up with the idea that we "form one body" with everything else? that everyone (and not just true "gentlemen") cannot bear the suffering of animals? that we feel pity when plants are destroyed and regret when stones are crushed? All of these notions are influenced by the metaphysics and ethics of Buddhism, in particular Hua-yan Buddhism, with its thesis that "All is one, and one is all."<sup>80</sup>

### V.A.3. *Mengzi, Aquinas, and Wang*

Mengzi is similar to Aquinas and Wang in that all three believe that a crucial human virtue involves taking pleasure in the well-being of other humans, being saddened by the suffering of others, and acting in appropriate ways on these feelings. However, each offers a different account of *why* this is a virtue and of the range and amplitude of this virtue. Wang, as a Ruist, advocated graded love. But he also believed we should have

<sup>77</sup> One *might* argue that the story of Ox Mountain is intended to play on some sympathy for plants, but it seems to me that the point of this metaphor is to illustrate only how the nature of something may be quite different from its current appearance.

<sup>78</sup> Mengzi does use the character *mǐn* 憫 in isolation, but only to refer to a sage's sadness over his own suffering: "When in poverty, he did not grieve (*min*)" (2A9, 5B1). We can see how the sense of "pity" would develop from this meaning, of course: from "to grieve" to "to grieve at the suffering of others." But this is evidently not its sense for Mengzi. (It would, of course, be the "lexical fallacy" to infer from Wang's use of a term not in the *Mengzi* to the inappropriateness of his interpretation. However, I take the difference in vocabulary to be merely a symptom of a deeper problem: the use of conceptions such as "forming one body" with everything, which are genuinely alien to Mengzi's worldview.)

<sup>79</sup> Chan, *Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, p. 462, which cites *Yi-shu* 3:2a in the *Er-Cheng quanshu*, *Sibu beiyao* edition.

<sup>80</sup> Recall the discussion in the Introduction of the differences between Mengzi's thought and that of his Buddhist-influenced School of the Way champions in the Song and later dynasties (Chapter 1, §1.B.3).



benevolence toward everything that exists, from our fellow humans, to other animals, to all living things, and even to inanimate objects. The justification for having this compassion is that we “form one body” with everything else that exists. In contrast, for Aquinas, we should have charity toward other humans, and the justification for this is our friendship with God, which makes all human beings our brothers and sisters. Aquinas and Wang are similar in that each grounds concern for others in a sort of metaphysical commonality. However, because his source of metaphysical commonality is transcendent, it is possible for Aquinas to justify practices such as celibacy. In contrast, Wang’s ground of commonality is immanent in the world. Mengzi’s views on benevolence are almost as different from Wang’s as they are from Aquinas’s. Mengzi holds that we should have the most benevolence for our parents, almost as much for other family members, some for “the people” and (if we are very benevolent) a bit for nonhuman animals. Mengzi gives several arguments for having benevolence, including the fact that genuine benevolence is advantageous to rulers. However, his primary argument is that we will never fully realize our nature as humans unless we develop all the virtues, including benevolence.

### V.B. Righteousness

One early text gives a definition of yì 義 that would probably be accepted by all Chinese thinkers: “Yì 義 is what is appropriate (yí 宜)” (*The Mean* 20.5). But this is only a “thin definition.” Philosophers differ over what is appropriate and how to determine it. Thus, as we saw, the Mohists argued that what is righteous is what benefits everyone as a whole, whereas Mengzi, in contrast, argued against using benefit or utility as a metric for choosing appropriate action.

As in the case of benevolence, Mengzi thinks that we innately have incipient dispositions toward righteousness but that we must “extend” them to become fully virtuous. Recall Mengzi’s examples from 7B31:

People all have things that they will not do. To extend this reaction to that which they will do is righteousness. . . . If people can fill out the heart that will not trespass, their righteousness will be inexhaustible. If people can fill out the core reaction of not accepting being addressed disrespectfully, there will be nowhere they go where they do not do what is righteous. If a scholar may not speak and speaks, this is flattering by speaking. If one should speak but does not speak, this is flattering by not speaking. These are both in the category (lèi 類) of trespassing.

Here Mengzi clearly states that all humans have a disposition to avoid certain actions and resist certain kinds of treatment.<sup>81</sup> In addition, Mengzi states that we become fully righteous by extending these reactions to other situations of the same kind (*lei*) where we do not yet have them. He illustrates this with a scenario that would be familiar to his audience in ancient China: Should a scholar who is employed as a government official join with courtiers in flattering the ruler or remain silent? Should he voice his objections to imprudent policies or not? When extension is achieved, Mengzi says, we will regard doing what is wrong in these cases the same as we now regard trespassing or accepting demeaning treatment.

Mengzi says that the “hearts” associated with the sprout of righteousness are *xiū wù* 羞惡. This binome is rendered “shame and dislike” (by Legge), “shame and repugnance” (by Giles), “shame and disgrace” (by Dobson), simply “shame” (by Ware and Lau), and (surprisingly) “conscience” (by Hinton). There seems to be substantive overlap between the use of “xiu” and related Chinese terms, on the one hand, and the use of Western terms associated with shame. As a result, I think it is quite legitimate to translate “xiu” using a term like “shame.” “Wu” can have different senses from “shame,” but Mengzi often uses it interchangeably with “xiu” and related terms, so there is reason to think he is using it in that sense in passages discussing the sprout of righteousness. I shall cite a number of Chinese texts to substantiate this point, but first I shall summarize what I take Mengzian righteousness to be.

The parts of righteousness parallel those of benevolence. Righteousness is a disposition to accord with agent-relative prohibitions involving the expression and preservation of one’s own ethical character. In particular, the righteous person disdains to do (or allow to be done to herself) what would demean her character and is ashamed of having done (or having allowed to be done to herself) what demeans her character. Righteousness primarily involves disdain and shame regarding *ethical* standards as opposed to mere standards of *appearance*. (For example, the righteous person is ashamed of having a poor character, not of having poor clothes.) The righteous person is disposed to notice the ethically relevant properties of situations (such as the fact that selling out for a large bribe is just as shameful as selling out for a small bribe), and she also feels and acts appropriately in response to these perceptions (such as refusing the bribe out of a feeling of disdain).

<sup>81</sup> I discussed this passage earlier, in §IV.B.2. On the relationship of 7B31 to 7A17, see Nivison, *Ways of Confucianism*, pp. 171–72.

*V.B.1. Conceptual Clarification*

To support the claim that we can understand Mengzian righteousness as a sense of shame, I should say something about what “we” understand a sense of shame to be. It is common, in recent Western discussions, to understand shame contrastively with guilt. There are various ways of cashing out this distinction. One of the most helpful, in my view, is to distinguish the emotions in terms of their focuses. As Bernard Williams put it,

*What I have done* points in one direction towards what has happened to others, in another direction to what I am. Guilt looks primarily in the first direction. . . . Shame looks to what I am.<sup>82</sup>

Furthermore, the two emotions are distinguished by what reactions they anticipate in others:

What arouses guilt in an agent is an act or omission of a sort that typically elicits from other people anger, resentment, or indignation. . . . What arouses shame, on the other hand, is something that typically elicits from others contempt or derision or avoidance.<sup>83</sup>

Williams gives us a sense for how shame in general differs from guilt. But it seems that there are different kinds of shame. Elsewhere, I have argued that there are two paradigmatic types of shame in Western philosophical literature: “conventional shame” and “ethical shame.”<sup>84</sup> The various views differ only regarding which paradigm they stress and how they flesh out some of the details of the paradigm. At one extreme, conventional shame is a sort of unpleasant feeling we have when we believe those whose views matter to us look down on us (or on those with whom we identify) on the basis of a standard of appearance we share. Let us examine some of the consequences of this definition. First, “those whose views matter to us” are not limited to people we like or admire. We can be ashamed, in this sense, before our “enemies.” Notice also that this kind of shame is dependent on what our standards of appearance are. Belching in public

<sup>82</sup> Williams, *Shame and Necessity*, pp. 92–93 (emphasis in original).

<sup>83</sup> Williams, *Shame and Necessity*, pp. 89–90.

<sup>84</sup> See Van Norden, “The Virtue of Righteousness in Mencius,” where I survey some seminal Western discussions of shame, including those of Aristotle, Rawls (*Theory of Justice*), Nussbaum (“Shame, Separateness and Political Unity”), Deigh (“Shame and Self-Esteem”), and Kekes (“Shame and Moral Progress”). As I acknowledge in this article, my work is indebted to that of Kwong-loi Shun, especially his doctoral dissertation, “Virtue, Mind and Morality.” In addition, I think “Natural Pride and Natural Shame” by Arnold Isenberg is still, more than fifty years after its initial publication, the most profound philosophical examination of shame.

may be cause for shame in one culture but not in another. You may think less of me because my clothes are inexpensive, but this will not cause me shame if I do not share your standards of appearance.<sup>85</sup> Feelings of conventional shame may be criticized as inappropriate or unwarranted in several ways: others do not look down on us, the opinions of those who look down on us do not matter, we should not identify with those others who look down on us, or we should not share the standard of appearance that makes others look down on us. For example, in trying to relieve our friend's shame, we say things like, "Nobody cares about your accent except you," "Who cares what he thinks? He's a jerk," "It's your husband who made a fool of himself at the party, not you," and "I don't care whether they thought it was tacky. *I* think it's very tasteful."

Ethical shame, in contrast, is a sort of unpleasant feeling we have when we believe that we (or those with whom we identify) have significant character flaws. It seems that we can also have ethical shame about our actions (or the actions of those with whom we identify). This is true, but I submit that we are ashamed of our actions because of what we think they reveal about our character. Feelings of ethical shame, like feelings of conventional shame, can be criticized as inappropriate or unwarranted because we are identifying with someone with whom we ought not to identify: "It was your brother who got arrested for shoplifting, not you." However, it is *not* relevant to ethical shame whether others are aware of our character flaws, or whether they look down on us because of them, or whether their opinions matter to us. It *is* relevant to ethical shame whether our character is really flawed. Thus, we may tell our friends, "You shouldn't be ashamed for something that happened twenty years ago. You're a different person now," or "Don't be so Victorian! There's nothing wrong with those kinds of feelings."

Let's look at some concrete example. (1) Susan is angry at herself for being cross with her husband in the morning. But, Susan reasons, she was rushed and irritable about all the papers she had to grade. Her momentary irascibility doesn't reflect any stable character flaw. She resolves to apologize when she gets home and put the matter behind her. In this case, Susan feels no shame, and justly so. (2) On her way to

<sup>85</sup>This must be qualified. To the extent that we are not certain of our own values, the deprecating treatment of others may cause us to doubt our values and feel shame. Sometimes this is clearly a bad thing. For example, racism can come to be internalized by some of its victims. However, I argue later in this section that some other kinds of susceptibility to shame-induced value change may be a sign of a virtuous humility and open-mindedness.

work, Susan's hair is blown up by the wind, so that it is sticking straight up when she gives her morning lecture. When Susan sees herself in the mirror after the lecture, she experiences conventional shame. (3) Susan has an extramarital affair. She and her husband have a happy, successful marriage, they do not have a polyamorous relationship, and Susan would be hurt and resentful if she found out her husband had had an affair. Now, what would it reveal about Susan's character if (regardless of whether the affair was discovered) she did *not* have feelings of ethical shame about what she had done? Is it even *intelligible* to suggest that she recognizes a serious discrepancy between the kind of person she thinks she should be and the kind of person she has discovered she is, yet she feels no shame? (Below, I'll turn to the issue of how conventional shame and ethical shame are related.)

Xunzi makes essentially the same distinction between ethical and conventional shame in response to some claims that had been advanced by the earlier philosopher Sòngzǐ 宋子. Songzi argues that (1) to suffer an insult is not a disgrace (rǔ 辱), (2) the belief that suffering an insult *is* a disgrace leads to violence, and (3) the realization that to suffer an insult is not a disgrace will eliminate (or, at least, lessen) violence. Xunzi raises two objections to Songzi's position. First, he notes that regarding behavior as disgraceful to oneself is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for violence. Humans often are violent in response to behavior that they dislike (*wu*), even if they do not regard it as disgraceful.<sup>86</sup> For example, one who assaults a robber need not do so because he regards the robber's behavior as humiliating.<sup>87</sup> Likewise, humans sometimes do not resort to violence, even if they do regard behavior as demeaning to them. For example, jesters accept humiliating insults and may not even dislike them.

Xunzi's second objection is especially interesting for our purposes, for he makes a distinction between "righteous" (yì 義) honor and disgrace, as opposed to "conventional" (shì 勢) honor and disgrace:

Cultivated intentions, many virtuous actions, insightful thinking – this is the honor that comes from within. It is this that is called righteous honor. Respected titles, great emoluments, superior power: at the highest being

<sup>86</sup>This use of *wu* shows that sometimes the term is used to describe an attitude distinct from that of regarding something as shameful. See also later in this subsection.

<sup>87</sup>Presumably, Songzi thought that regarding suffering an insult as a disgrace was *one* source of violence, not the only one. However, Xunzi uncharitably took Songzi to be making the stronger claim. Songzi, whose full name is Sòngkèng 宋輕, has a dialogue with Mengzi that I discuss later in this chapter, §VI.B.

emperor or feudal lord, or at the lowest being viceroy, prime minister, functionary, or grand official – this is the honor that arrives from without. It is this that is called conventional honor. Licentiousness, baseness, overstepping boundaries, bringing chaos to order, being arrogant, destructive, and greedy – that is the disgrace that come from within. It is this that is called righteous disgrace. Being reviled, insulted, grabbed, hit, flogged, mutilated, beheaded, drawn and quartered, led in chains – this is the disgrace that arrives from without. It is this that is called conventional disgrace. These are the two kinds of honor and disgrace.

Hence, a noble can have conventional disgrace, but cannot have righteous disgrace. A pretty person can have conventional honor, but cannot have righteous honor.<sup>88</sup>

Note that the distinction that Xunzi draws between different kinds of disgrace seems to be very similar to the distinction I identified in the Western tradition between what is “conventionally shameful” and what would be “ethically shameful.”

#### *V.B.2. “Xiu” and “Wu” as Shame Terms*

With these distinctions and observations in mind, let us examine what several early Ruist texts say about “xiu,” “wu,” and related terms. The term “xiu” is not very common in early Ruist texts. It is a *hapax legomenon* in the *Analects* (13.22), in the context of Kongzi apparently quoting a “line statement” from the *Yijing*: “If his Virtue is not constant, he will perhaps incur shame (*xiu*).” However, we saw earlier that this passage is somewhat suspect (Chapter 2, §I.C). So “xiu” may actually not occur in any *Analects* passage reliably attributable to Kongzi.

In the *Mengzi*, in addition to the example involving Liuxia Hui (discussed later in this section), Mengzi described a chariot driver who is *xiu* regarding helping an archer cheat in a ritual hunt (3B1), and a wife and concubine who are *xiu* regarding their husband’s begging to gain luxuries (4B33). Moreover, “xiu” is closely related to two other shame terms in Classical Chinese: *chǐ* 恥 and *rǔ* 辱. Indeed, the three terms are frequently defined in terms of one another. Consequently, I shall assume that the use of the latter two terms sheds light on the meaning of “xiu.”<sup>89</sup>

<sup>88</sup> Translation mine; see *Xunzi, Zheng lun*, HY 69/18/105–9.

<sup>89</sup> For examples, see the entries for “chi” (4–10585), “ru” (10–38686), and “xiu” (9–28471) in Morohashi, *Daikanwajiten*. There are some grammatical differences among the three terms. *Wu xiu zhi* and *Wu chi zhi* could both mean either “I am ashamed of it” or “I bring shame upon it.” *Wu ru zhi*, however, could mean only “I bring shame upon it.” *Chi* is, I think, the only one of the three that can refer to a sense of shame. (Note that in 2A6 and 6A6 Mencius is using *xiu* not to refer to the sense of shame, but to the attitude characteristic of that sense.)

From the *Analects*, we learn that, although people sometimes are *chi* about poor clothes, poor food (4:9), asking questions of social inferiors (5:15), and being poorly dressed in the presence of those who are well dressed (9:27), they should not be *chi* about these things. We also learn that, whether they are or not, people *should* be *chi* about being poor and lowly in a well-ordered state, or being wealthy and esteemed in an ill-ordered state (8:13), not living up to one's words (4:22), and toadying and feigning friendship (5:25).

From Mengzi, we learn that a ruler can be *chi* about military defeats his state has suffered (1A5.1), about the outrageous behavior of another ruler (1B3.7), about accepting the orders of another state (4A8.3–4), or about allowing a worthy person to starve for want of employment in his state (6B14.4). In general, one can be *chi* about being the servant of another (2A7.3), about one's reputation exceeding one's merits (4B18.3), about taking an official position and not succeeding in having a positive ethical effect (5B5.5), and about not being as good as others (7A7.3).

Both Kongzi (as represented in the *Analects*) and Mengzi stress the importance for being a good person of a sense of shame. For example, when asked what is necessary in order to be a true scholar, Kongzi responds (13:20), "Conducting himself with a sense of shame (*chi*), and not doing dishonor to (*ru*) his ruler's mandate when sent abroad as a diplomat – such a person could be called a scholar." In a similar vein, Mengzi says that "A person may not be without a sense of shame (*chi*). The shamefulness of being without a sense of shame is shameless indeed" (7A6). He also asks the rhetorical question, "If one is not ashamed of not being as good as others, how will one ever be as good as others?" (7A7) However, there does seem to be more stress in the *Analects* on the importance of *not* feeling shame when it is *inappropriate* to do so (e.g., a scholar should not be ashamed of honest poverty), and more stress in the *Mengzi* on feeling shame (or being disposed to feel shame at certain contemplated courses of action) when it *is* appropriate to do so.

In general, if we review the examples I have drawn from the *Analects*, *Mengzi*, and *Xunzi*, we find that what might be considered *ru*, or what is considered a possible object of *xiu* or *chi*, corresponds very closely to paradigmatic examples of what is regarded as either conventionally or ethically shameful in the Western tradition.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>90</sup>Shun concludes that *xiu* and *chi* are attitudes of disdain toward things that fall below certain standards and that these standards can be either "social standards" (*Mencius*, p. 60) or "ethical standards" (*ibid.*, p. 62). This seems in line with my own conclusion.

“Wu” is quite common in early Chinese texts and has several distinct meanings. I shall limit my discussion here to occurrences that I think are particularly illuminating of the connection of *wu* with righteousness. Often, “wu” seems to mean simply “dislike,” as when Mengzi talks about disliking dampness (2A4), death (4A3, 6A10), and having an injured finger (6A12), or when he advises rulers not to do to their subjects what they dislike (4A9). In other passages, however, *wu* seems closer to *xin*, in that it involves regarding something as ethically condemnable, and not just as undesirable. Thus, Mengzi talks about “disdaining disgrace” (2A4, *wu ru*), “disdaining the violation of ritual” (3B7), “disdaining drunkenness” (4A3), “disdaining [to serve] a base ruler” (6B6), “disdaining one’s ethical sense (*xin*) not being as good as others” (6A12), disdaining what is specious (7B37), disdaining to associate with unseemly individuals (2A9), and disdaining to accept humiliating treatment (6A10).

Given that “wu” has such a broad range of meanings (some of which have nothing to do with the sort of ethical disdain characteristic of *xin*), why does Mengzi use the binome “xiuwu” for the attitude that corresponds to the virtue of righteousness? Zhu Xi is perhaps the first commentator to address the issue of the precise meaning of the binome “xiuwu.” He suggests that “*Xiu* is to be ashamed about (chǐ 恥) what is not good in oneself. *Wu* is to hate what is not good in others.”<sup>91</sup> However, as Kwong-loi Shun has pointed out, this cannot be correct, because Mengzi sometimes uses *wu* to describe one’s attitude toward one’s own unethical actions (e.g., 6A10, 6B6).<sup>92</sup> Donald Munro argues that “‘dislike’ [*wu*] suggests an innate sense of repugnance at some acts, and ‘shame’ [*xin*] suggests the feelings (considered to be universal) that follow transgressions.”<sup>93</sup> Shun makes the additional suggestion that there is a difference between *wu* and *xin* even when each is directed toward “one’s own actions or things that happen to oneself.” Specifically, “the attitude involved in *wu* when so directed is like the attitude that one has toward what one dislikes in others.”<sup>94</sup> This may be correct. However, it seems to me that any effort to make a precise distinction between *xin* and *wu* is doomed to failure, because Mengzi sometimes uses the terms interchangeably. Thus, in 2A9 and again in 5B1, we are told that Liuxia Hui did not *xin* serving a corrupt lord, whereas in 6B6 we are told that he did not *wu* serving

<sup>91</sup> *Sishu jizhu* 2A6.4.

<sup>92</sup> Shun, *Mencius*, p. 60.

<sup>93</sup> Munro, *Concept of Man in Early China*, p. 75.

<sup>94</sup> Shun, *Mencius*, p. 60.



a corrupt lord. We know that serving a corrupt lord was something Liuxia Hui actually did, so it is in the class of actions that involve himself. On Munro's or Shun's interpretation, Mengzi must wish to attribute to Liuxia Hui slightly different attitudes toward his serving a corrupt lord in 2A9/5B1 and in 6B6. In order to be convinced of this, I would like to have an explanation of why Mengzi wishes to attribute different attitudes to Liuxia Hui in these passages.

I think there is some reason, though, why Mengzi combines "xiu" with "wu" (instead of combining the former with "chi," for example). There *seems* to have been a tradition of using "wu" to refer to an attitude of disdain toward reprehensible things. For example, in *Analects* Book 4, we find the sayings, "Only the humane are able to be fond of others, or are able to disdain (*wu*) others" (4.3), and "I have yet to meet a person who truly loved humaneness or hated a lack of humaneness. One who loved humaneness could not be surpassed, while one who hated a lack of humaneness would at least be able to act in a humane fashion, insofar as he would not tolerate that which is not humane being associated with his person" (4.6). Similarly, in Book 17, we find a litany of things that the gentleman "disdains" (*wu*), including courage without propriety (17.22). Finally, the *Greater Learning* characterizes ethical "genuineness" (chéng 誠) by saying that the proper attitude toward ethical evil and good "is like hating (*wu*) a hateful smell, like loving a lovely sight" (Commentary 6). Now, recall that Book 4 is the one Bruce and Taeko Brooks have argued is the earliest in the text, whereas Book 17 is in the section identified by Cui Shu as being late, and the *Greater Learning* dates from the end of the classical period. Consequently, this usage seems to be common over a wide historical period.

Part of what is philosophically important about this use of "wu" is that it suggests that our attitude of ethical disdain is not different in kind from our general attitudes of dislike and disapproval. Rather, our dislike of an icky, damp environment is much like our disdain of what is shameful (2A4); our dislike of death is like our disdain to do what is not righteous (6A10). So using the term "wu," whose meaning overlaps both shame and our natural distaste for unpleasant things like dampness, helps us conceptualize our sense of shame as a natural instinct.

There seems to be good reason to believe, then, that "xiu" and "wu" are Chinese shame terms. Specifically, for Mengzi, to *xiu* X is to regard X as shameful, and depending on the context to *wu* X can be to regard X as shameful. Depending on the relationship between X and oneself, to *xiu* X or *wu* X may or may not involve feeling the emotion of shame.

So *xiu* and *wu* refer to the attitudes related to, but not identical with, the emotion of shame. We might, therefore, refer to them as “emotional attitudes” and translate them as “disdain and dislike” in passages such as *Mengzi* 2A6 and 6A6.

The capacity to have these emotional attitudes (what Mengzi calls “the sprout of righteousness”) is precisely a sense of shame. It is, furthermore, an ethical sense of shame, since (as the examples above show) Mengzi almost always uses his “shame vocabulary” in connection with failures of character, as opposed to standards of appearance. In general, the examples we have considered suggest that early Ruists are at pains to minimize the significance of “conventional shame” and to emphasize the importance of “ethical shame.”

### *V.B.3. Philosophical Issues Raised by Shame*

Is it just homonymy that we call both conventional and ethical shame “shame”? I think there is a deep connection between the two emotions. The connection exists because, as Aristotle and Mengzi long ago emphasized, humans are social animals. Humans are social not only because we enjoy interacting with other humans but also because interacting with other humans is necessary to help us correctly exercise our theoretical and practical reason. Part of being a good theoretician (be it economist, physicist, or professor of English) is being responsive to the opinions of one’s colleagues. A researcher who is completely indifferent to the praise and criticisms of her colleagues is, ipso facto, a bad researcher. Likewise, part of being a good practical reasoner is being responsive to the opinions of the members of one’s ethical community. One who is completely indifferent to the ethical opinions of others is a dangerous fanatic.<sup>95</sup>

I realize that not everyone will share this conception of theoretical and practical reason. In his *Discourse on Method*, Descartes presents a vivid and influential picture of the theoretical reasoner, “shut up alone in a stove-heated room,” tracing out his thoughts without the distraction of other people. This has its ethical counterpart in the hero of much modern literature, following his pure conscience in the face of the mob.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>95</sup> That Mengzi sees a connection between conventional standards and ethical shame is suggested by the intimate relationship he sees between the virtue of righteousness and the virtue of propriety. On this point, see §V.C, later in this chapter.

<sup>96</sup> Descartes, *Selected Philosophical Writings*, p. 25. Indeed, Williams criticizes what he calls “ethical Cartesianism” (Williams, *Shame and Necessity*, p. 99), and my position here is very close to his.

(Consider Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*.) And certainly there are cases in which people ought to stick to their theoretical and practical commitments in the face of even extreme criticism and opposition. But just as an inability to innovate or challenge others shows an unhealthy lack of pride, so does unresponsiveness to the opinions of others show the vice of hubris.

So ethical shame and conventional shame are closely related because caring about how one appears to others is required by the virtue of humility. I am not denying that it is conceptually possible for there to be creatures subject to ethical shame but not conventional shame. But I do not think humans are that kind of creature. I submit that it is not psychologically possible for humans to have the kind of humility that allows us to learn from others yet not be liable to conventional shame.

Bernard Williams has provided a philosophically revealing discussion of shame in connection with classical Greek thought in his *Shame and Necessity*. Much of what Williams says in this book should be of interest to students of early Chinese thought as well, but here I shall focus on one point: his discussion of the oft-heard claim that ancient Greece had a "shame culture" as opposed to our own contemporary "guilt culture." As Williams illustrates, this claim can be very misleading if we assume a crude caricature of what shame is. Furthermore, the Greeks sometimes used their shame vocabulary to describe emotions that can focus on the victim (rather than the agent) of wrong action, and they think that disgraceful actions can properly precipitate feelings of righteous indignation from others (as opposed to feelings of contempt). But, as we saw earlier, these are among the distinguishing characteristics of guilt. These points place significant limits on the usefulness of thinking of Greece as a "shame culture."<sup>97</sup>

My sense is that, when people describe Greece or China as a "shame culture," they often have in mind "conventional shame," to the exclusion of "ethical shame." However, we saw that the early Ruist tradition emphasizes "ethical shame" over "conventional shame." So long as we keep this qualification in mind, I think that we may fairly say that ancient Chinese

<sup>97</sup>Nonetheless, Williams thinks there is some point to the distinction: their emotional reactions "were not simply guilt if they were not separately recognised as such; just as shame is not the same when it does not have guilt as a contrast" (*Shame and Necessity*, p. 91). Williams also argues against the claims that being motivated by shame is, in any simple way, superficial, heteronomous, or egoistic. I invite anyone who regards shame as an unethical or ethically primitive notion to read Williams, *Shame and Necessity*, especially Chapter 4, and Isenberg, "Natural Pride and Natural Shame."

culture was more thoroughly a shame culture than was ancient Greece. In all examples I have discovered, Chinese “shame” always focuses on the subject of the emotion rather than those whom the subject affects (if any). I am ashamed of what *I* do, or of what *I* am subjected to, but not of what happens to *you* because of what I do. Is there, then, no room in Chinese ethics for the perspective of the victim? There is, but it is provided in a different way. Virtues such as benevolence (*ren*) and kindness (*en*), and their associated emotions (such as compassion), focus on victims. For example, recall *Mengzi* 1A7, in which King Xuan is asked to show compassion toward his subjects (whose suffering is caused, in great part, by the ruler’s neglect and abuse).<sup>98</sup>

What about the righteous rage associated with Greek shame? The Ruist attitude toward righteous rage is complicated. For example, it seems to have been a conventional view among Ruists during *Mengzi*’s era that one should not succumb to bitterness (*yuàn* 怨), even if the cause of the rancor is bad treatment by others (2B13, 5A1.2, 5B1.3, 6B3.1). *Mengzi* sometimes seems to share this view (2A9.2, 5A3.2, 5B1.3), but elsewhere he seems to be at pains to justify the bitterness or anger (*nù* 怒) of the virtuous (1B3, 2B13, 5A1.2, 6B3.2–4). Thus, he commends Sage King Shun because he did not “store up anger, or dwell in bitterness” towards his brother – despite the fact that his brother attempted fratricide (5A3.2)! On the other hand, *Mengzi* also refers approvingly to Sage King Wu, who, being “ashamed” that there were people in the world “behaving obstinately,” “brought peace to the people of the world with one burst of anger” (1B3.7). However, note that King Wu is ashamed *that others are behaving in an obstinate way*. Their behavior is an affront to Heaven, with whose “will” Wu identifies. It would seem odd to say in this context that the king felt “guilty” that others were behaving obstinately. Furthermore, another passage says of someone who undergoes a moral transformation that he “regretted his errors, was *angry with himself*, and reformed himself” (5A6.5). These examples suggest several conclusions: (1) the early Ruist attitude toward righteous rage was ambivalent. (2) Ruist shame is *not* like guilt in anticipating the righteous anger of others; insofar as righteous rage is connected with shame, it is anger toward oneself, or toward others who subject oneself to shame. (3) As we noted above, Ruist shame focuses on the subject of the emotion rather than the victims (if any) of shameful actions.

<sup>98</sup> Note also that, in contrast, benevolence is not mentioned as a virtue by either Plato or Aristotle.

These differences between one of the “founding traditions” of China and one of the founding traditions of the West may help explain other differences. For example, it has been suggested that the Chinese tradition has no indigenous conception of “human rights.”<sup>99</sup> This is perhaps too extreme a claim. The notion of a “right” can be conceptualized in so many alternative *thick* ways that it is hard to imagine there are no corresponding concepts of any kind in the Chinese tradition. For example, in some *thin* sense, we might say that Ruists think that the people have a “right” to benevolent treatment by their rulers. But it does seem that ancient Greece placed more emphasis on something like guilt than did ancient China, and rights are more closely associated with guilt: when we consider a violation of a person’s rights, the focus is typically on the victim, whose righteous rage we anticipate. Consequently, despite all the ways in which the culture of Homer is alien to us, the average Westerner who is intent on seeing her rights observed has more in common in this respect with “the best of the Achaians” than with Sage King Shun.

Interestingly, Aristotle denies that a sense of shame is a virtue:

Further, if someone is in a state that would make him feel disgrace if he were to do a disgraceful action, and because of this thinks he is decent, that is absurd. For shame is concerned with what is voluntary, and the decent person will never willingly do base actions. Shame might, however, be decent on an assumption; for if [the decent person] were to do [these disgraceful actions], he would feel disgrace; but this does not apply to the virtues.<sup>100</sup>

This is not altogether clear. However, I suspect Aristotle’s point is the following. It is true that the virtuous person has a disposition, such that, were she to do something disgraceful, she would feel shame. However, there are conceptual problems with identifying this disposition as a virtue. First, the virtuous person, qua virtuous person, will not do what is shameful, and so will have no occasion for exercising this disposition. Second, the exercise of virtues is constitutive of human flourishing, but the exercise of a disposition to feel shame is decidedly not constitutive of human flourishing. Hence, it seems that this disposition cannot be a virtue. Aristotle’s points are well-taken, but we should add the following qualifications. Although it is true that virtuous people do not, qua virtuous people, do what is shameful, no real humans are perfect. Real humans will have opportunities to exercise the disposition to feel shame. Furthermore,

<sup>99</sup> Rosemont, *Chinese Mirror*.

<sup>100</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 115 (iv.9, 1128b). (The bracketed phrases are supplied in the translation cited.)

Aristotle seems to have ignored the role of a “sense of shame” as a disposition to regard as shameful (and hence avoid) certain courses of action.

Patricia Greenspan has made some remarks that might help explain why Aristotle seems to deemphasize shame in comparison with Mengzi:

Aristotle’s dismissal of shame in virtuous adults underlines the uncompromising quality of his conception of virtue. The list of virtues derived from Aristotle is not really well-designed, one might say, to advise an agent *in media res*, as opposed to an educator or someone else who is in a position to plan lives from the outset or to judge them as a whole.<sup>101</sup>

In contrast, in the *Mengzi*, we find our philosopher typically advising far-from-perfect adults *in media res*.

In summary, for Mengzi righteousness is a disposition to disdain or regard as shameful certain character traits and the actions that would be characteristic of them. Anyone recognizably human will regard some things as shameful and disdain to do them. However, part of ethical development is coming to “extend” the cases where one does have the reaction of disdain to relevantly similar cases where one does not yet have the reaction. Humans sometimes feel shame and disdain toward what is conventionally regarded as shameful in one’s society, including having low social status and poverty. But one should disdain to do only what is ethically shameful. Paradigmatic examples of genuinely shameful activities include cheating at games, accepting bribes, assisting or flattering a vicious ruler, and allowing oneself to be treated with contempt. Sadly, people often do what is genuinely shameful in order to avoid what is only conventionally shameful (e.g., accepting a prestigious and lucrative job that involves demeaning oneself).

### V.C. Propriety

In Chapter 2, §II.A.1, I extensively discussed the role of *lǐ* 禮 in Ruism as the *social practice* of ritual. However, for Mengzi “li” refers to not just a *practice*, but also a *virtue*. Three questions immediately present themselves. What is *li* as a virtue (which I shall render “propriety”)? How is it related to *li* as a practice (“rites” or “ritual”)? How is propriety different from the other virtues? There is internal evidence in the *Mengzi* that our philosopher is a little uncertain about this virtue himself. Propriety is the only virtue that is associated with different emotional reactions in a

<sup>101</sup> Greenspan, “Guilt and Virtue,” p. 62.

pair of key passages describing the four virtues: in 2A6 it is associated with *cí ràng* 辭讓, “deference,” and in 6A6 it is associated with *gōng jìng* 恭敬, “reverence.” Also puzzling is Mengzi’s description of propriety in 4A27, a passage that presents one of his most detailed discussions of the virtues and their interrelationships. After describing benevolence, righteousness, and wisdom, Mengzi says, “The substance of *li* is to regulate and adorn [benevolence and righteousness]. The substance of music is to delight in [benevolence and righteousness].” A natural way of reading this is as claiming that *ritual practices* regulate and adorn the expressions of benevolence and righteousness. Thus, a person might express her fondness for her parents (a manifestation of benevolence) through the ritual practice of a birthday party. And I expressed and moderated my grief at my parents’ deaths with funeral rituals. The fact that Mengzi immediately brings up music after discussing *li* suggests that he is talking about rituals, since many ritual practices were done with musical accompaniment. If this reading is correct, however, it seems that Mengzi himself thought of *li* primarily in the sense of ritual practice rather than as a virtue.

Lee H. Yearley developed a seductively sophisticated account of the virtue of propriety, based on the analysis offered by Shun in his doctoral dissertation.<sup>102</sup> He agrees with Shun’s central claim: propriety involves the expression of respect through ritual activities. Yearley adds to this an explanation of why Mengzi links the expression of respect to ritual activities: it is only through such conventional activities that it is possible for humans to express respect at all. Yearley also expands Shun’s account by offering an explanation of why propriety is a cardinal virtue for Mengzi. He suggests that the deference or yielding manifested by propriety “corrects . . . a major deformation from which humans suffer. It corrects people’s love of mastery and movement to self-aggrandizement, and therefore also their tendency to resent others and to seek more than they need or are due. . . . Both [wisdom] and courage . . . are corrupted by the absence of yielding.”<sup>103</sup> This provides a theoretically elegant interpretation of Mengzi’s view, although Yearley is not able to cite specific textual evidence from the *Mengzi* to support it. However, in the *Analects* there is some evidence for this view. Kongzi is reported to have said, “Respect without *li* becomes officiousness. . . . Courage without *li* becomes rashness” (8.2). In addition, it is possible to read 4A27 in a way that supports

<sup>102</sup> Yearley, *Mencius and Aquinas*, p. 211n11.

<sup>103</sup> Yearley, *Mencius and Aquinas*, pp. 41–42.

Yearley. I assumed above that the line “The substance of *li* is to regulate and adorn [benevolence and righteousness]” means that *ritual practices* “regulate and adorn” benevolence and righteousness. However, it could conceivably mean that the virtue of *ritual propriety* “regulates and adorns” the virtues of benevolence and righteousness. In other words, perhaps propriety is a virtue that helps to preserve other virtues.

Robert Eno has suggested that propriety is not a distinct virtue at all, but is simply another name for righteousness: “‘Yi’ shares with ‘li’ the meaning of ‘what is right to do,’ but it is not limited by reference to the [traditional] codes of conduct, and so appears to have a universal sense, as opposed to the restricted sense of ‘li.’”<sup>104</sup> Eno marshals some striking evidence in support of his hypothesis. For example, he notes that, in the extended discussion of righteousness in 6A5, the examples of righteous behavior are all examples of behavior dictated by ritual.<sup>105</sup> In addition, the same passage describes *jing* 敬 as the emotion appropriate to righteousness, but this is the emotion associated with propriety in 6A6.<sup>106</sup>

I think the accounts of Shun, Yearley, and Eno are ultimately consistent with one another and provide an analysis of Mengzi’s understanding of propriety as a virtue that is both textually defensible and philosophically interesting. There is one disposition, which we discuss under the description of “righteousness” when we think of it as a disposition to do what is right in general, and under the description of “propriety” when we think of it as a disposition to do what is dictated by the communal conventions and ongoing traditions of which we are a part. (Mengzi would regard these two descriptions as overlapping because he thinks the traditions of his culture [properly understood] are morally right.) Propriety is an important virtue for two reasons. First, humans need ritual activities to express certain feelings (such as expressing respect by bowing or letting someone go first through a door). Second, propriety is important because humans are prone to self-aggrandizement. As a virtue, propriety manifests itself in participation in ritual expressions of deference and respect. These activities reinforce our sense of humility in the face of the larger groups to which we belong. (Thus understood, propriety as a virtue would use ritual activities to perform the functions I attributed to them in Chapter 2, §II.A.1.)

<sup>104</sup> Eno, *Confucian Creation of Heaven*, p. 112.

<sup>105</sup> Eno, *Confucian Creation of Heaven*, p. 115.

<sup>106</sup> Eno, *Confucian Creation of Heaven*, p. 118 and p. 261n64.



## V.D. Wisdom

Wisdom is central to the Western virtue ethics traditions. However, in the tradition that grows out of Mengzi's thought, it is clearly subordinated to benevolence and righteousness. Indeed, there has been little discussion of what wisdom is for Mengzi and why it is a cardinal virtue at all. However, I submit that if we read the *Mengzi* carefully, we can see a well-developed conception of this virtue and its significance.

*Mengzi* 5A9 is a neglected text that is deeply illuminating of wisdom:

Wan Zhang asked, "Some people say that Boli Xi sold himself to a herder in the state of Qin for five ram skins, and fed cattle, because he sought to meet Duke Mu of Qin. Is this trustworthy?"

Mengzi said, "It is not. That is not the case. This was fabricated by those obsessed with taking office. Boli Xi was a person of the state of Yu. The people of the state of Jin, in exchange for jade from Chui Ji and a team of horses from Qu, gained right of passage through Yu to attack the state of Guo. Gongzhiqi remonstrated against this, but Boli Xi did not remonstrate against it. He knew that the Duke of Yu could not be remonstrated with, so he left and went to Qin. He was already seventy years old. If he did not yet know that it would be base to feed oxen in order to seek to meet Duke Mu of Qin, could he have been called wise? He knew that [the Duke of Yu] could not be remonstrated with so he did not remonstrate with him. Can this be called unwise? He knew that the Duke of Yu was about to perish, so he abandoned him first. This cannot be called unwise. When he was, in good time, raised to prominence in Qin, he knew that Duke Mu was someone with whom he could work, so he became his minister. Can this be called unwise? He was a minister in Qin and made his lord distinguished throughout the world, so that he is an example for later ages. Is this something he would be capable of if he were not a worthy person? To sell oneself so as to accomplish things for one's lord – even a villager who cared for himself would not do this. Can one say that a worthy person would do it?"

This passage repeatedly emphasizes Boli Xi's wisdom. Consequently, careful analysis of it should reveal much about Mengzi's understanding of this virtue.

In exchange for a handful of gifts for himself, the ruler of the state of Yu granted the state of Jin right of passage to march its armies through Yu to attack Guo. The dangers of this concession are manifest. Yu is located in between Jin and Guo. If Jin succeeds in conquering Guo, Yu will be surrounded by territory controlled by Jin (which will be a larger and more powerful adversary after its conquest of Guo). If Jin fails to conquer Guo, Guo will have become the enemy of the state of Yu. In fact, Jin conquered Guo and then proceeded to conquer Yu as well.

Boli Xi's behavior is surprising in several respects.<sup>107</sup> First, he does not remonstrate with the ruler of Yu over his decision to accept the bribes. Mengzi explains that "He knew (zhī 知) that the Duke of Yu could not be remonstrated with. . . . He knew (zhī 知) that [the Duke of Yu] could not be remonstrated with so he did not remonstrate with him. Can this be called unwise (bú zhì 不智)?" This suggests that part of wisdom is being a good judge of the character of others. Further evidence that the wise are good judges of character may be found later in the passage, when Mengzi remarks that Boli Xi "knew (zhī 知) that Duke Mu was someone with whom he could work, so he became his minister. Can this be called unwise (bú zhì 不智)?" My students are sometimes puzzled by Boli Xi's next action, though: "He knew that the Duke of Yu was about to perish, so he abandoned him first. This cannot be called unwise (bú zhì 不智)." However, Mengzi's assumption here about wisdom seems very plausible to me: a wise person has a healthy concern for his own well-being. Boli Xi judges (correctly) that the state he lives in is doomed because his ruler is a greedy fool. Nothing will be achieved by Boli Xi's waiting around for his own death in Yu. So he flees. The major puzzle of the passage, though, is how Boli Xi ended up tending oxen in the state of Qin. Wan Zhang reports that "some people say" that Boli Xi sold himself into servitude, so that he could gain the attention of the ruler of Qin by doing a good job at tending his oxen. Mengzi dismisses this possibility: "He was already seventy years old. If he did not yet know (zhī 知) that it would be base to feed oxen in order to seek to meet Duke Mu of Qin, could he have been called wise (zhì 智)?" Again, Mengzi's assumption throughout is that Boli Xi *is* wise. So his behavior reveals to us manifestations of wisdom, and we can rule out possible assertions about him on the grounds that they are inconsistent with his wisdom. Since a wise person would not sell himself into servitude to meet a ruler, and since Boli Xi was wise, he did not do it. So another part of wisdom is understanding what is "base" (wū 污). Finally, Mengzi remarks that Boli Xi "was a minister in Qin and made his lord distinguished throughout the world, so that he is an example for later ages. Is this something he would be capable of if he were not a worthy person (bù xián 不賢)?" Presumably, Boli Xi did many things that made the ruler of Qin "distinguished throughout the world." However, as

<sup>107</sup> A theme that shows up repeatedly in the *Mengzi* is the fact that most people have difficulty in understanding the actions of the genuinely virtuous and often regard them as puzzling or even vicious. Paradoxically, those with semblances of virtues often appear admirable. This is no doubt related to the fact that ethical connoisseurs appreciate things that are not apparent to nonconnoisseurs (Chapter 1, §II.B.3.b).

his minister, a significant part of his job must have involved “means-end deliberation.” In other words, Boli Xi must have been adept at figuring out the best means to achieve a given end and at judging what the likely consequences are of various courses of action.<sup>108</sup>

So from this one passage, we can see that Mengzian wisdom has at least four parts: (1) the disposition to properly evaluate the characters of others; (2) skill at means-end deliberation: the ability to deliberate well about the best means to achieve given ends and to determine the likely consequences of various courses of action; (3) an understanding of, and disposition to avoid, what is base (i.e., an appreciation of and commitment to virtuous behavior); and (4) a healthy concern for one’s own well-being. Each part is reflected in other parts of the *Mengzi* as well.

(1) *Mengzi* 2A2.25 suggests that wisdom is a disposition to properly evaluate the character of others: Zaiwo, Zigong, and Youruo are said to have “wisdom (智) sufficient to recognize (知) a sage.” However, Mengzi is also at pains to point out that wisdom, even of a sage, is not infallible in its character judgments. Indeed, having full virtue seems to make one vulnerable to certain kinds of deception. So Mengzi admits (2Bg) that the Duke of Zhou, despite being a sage, failed to realize that his elder brother, Guan Shu, would lead a revolt against the Zhou Dynasty. Mengzi adds, though, “The Duke of Zhou was the younger brother. Guan Shu was the elder brother. Was not the Duke of Zhou’s error fitting?” Consequently, the Duke of Zhou’s error seems to be a result of his virtue rather than a failure of it. There is also an intriguing (although complex and difficult to interpret) set of anecdotes in *Mengzi* 5A2 that might be making a similar point. Mengzi’s disciple Wan Zhang asks about the story that the sage Shun was almost murdered by his evil brother Xiang. Unbeknownst to Xiang, Shun survives the attempt. When Shun then discovers Xiang in Shun’s house, already enjoying his brother’s belongings, Xiang offers the implausible explanation that he was there because he was concerned for Shun’s safety. Shun’s response is to offer his brother an official position in his government. Wan Zhang wants to know whether Shun really did not realize (知) that Xiang planned to murder him. Mengzi replies that Shun *did* realize this, but that he acted out of his unfeigned affection for his brother. Mengzi then tells the story of Zichan, another sage,

<sup>108</sup> One might have some concerns about whether Mengzi’s final comments are about wisdom at all, since he switches from talking about zhì 智 to talking about xián 賢. However, 賢 is a broader concept than 智, so the former may encompass the latter. (We shall also see later that there is further textual evidence that good means-end deliberation is part of wisdom for Mengzi.)

who instructed a servant to release a prized fish into a pond. Zichan was pleased by the servant's vivid description of the fish's joy at being released into the pond. In reality, though, the servant had cooked the fish and eaten it. "Who said Zichan was wise?" the servant gloated. Mengzi comments,

Hence a gentleman can be tricked by his own practices. But it is difficult to ensnare him with what is not his Way. Xiang came in accordance with the Way of a loving elder brother. Hence, he genuinely had faith in him and delighted in him. How could he be feigning that?

The anecdote about Zichan clearly illustrates that sagely wisdom can actually make one vulnerable to certain kinds of deception. However, Mengzi does not deplore this. Shun's situation is more subtle. Mengzi clearly wants to deny that Shun simply fails to realize what is going on. However, his fondness for his elder brother overrides his knowledge. (This is almost a sort of "virtuous weakness of will.") We might say, then, that Shun and Zichan are at different points along a spectrum of being deceived, in which Shun is partially, and Zichan completely, deceived as a result of their own best traits. I worry that I may have over-interpreted this passage, but it seems to require a reading just this subtle.

In short, Mengzi connects wisdom with judging well the character of others, but he expresses more doubt than the *Analects* about the perfectability of this virtue.

(2) *Mengzi* 5B1 is an intriguing passage that, I argue, identifies skill at means-end deliberation as a part of wisdom:

Wisdom may be compared to skillfulness (qiǎo 巧). Sagacity (shèng 聖) may be compared to strength. It is like shooting an arrow from beyond a hundred paces: its making it there is due to your strength, but its hitting the bullseye is not due to your strength. (5B1.7)

Here, wisdom is explicitly compared to skillfulness and to the ability to aim one's arrow correctly at the bullseye. But what is the contrast Mengzi wishes to draw with sagacity? Sagacity is compared to strength, which is the ability to shoot the arrow far. Now, the ability to shoot the arrow far is dangerous if it is not combined with the ability to aim properly. On the other hand, the ability to aim is useless if it is not combined with the strength required to actually reach the target. In certain respects, this is like the relationship between wisdom and the other virtues. If I am "wise" but not benevolent and righteous, I will know how to do what is appropriate, but I will lack the proper motivations to persevere in doing

it. If I have benevolence and righteousness but am not wise, I will be properly motivated, but I will lack the skillfulness that would allow me to achieve my goals.

I believe that skill at means-end deliberation is the part of wisdom that is emphasized in 1B3, in which Mengzi observes that “One who can serve a large state with a small one is someone who is in awe of Heaven. . . . Those who are in awe of Heaven protect their states.” A ruler who finds that his state is under the domination of a larger state has a precarious situation: his state is in constant danger of being annexed or bled dry by the demands of the larger state. Only significant skill at means-end deliberation will allow one to navigate this course successfully.

(3) An appreciation of and commitment to virtuous behavior is particularly evident in 4A27, where, after discussing benevolence and righteousness, Mengzi comments, “The core (shí 實) of wisdom is knowing these two and not abandoning them.”

*Mengzi* 2A7 expresses both the understanding of (3) wisdom as a “meta-virtue,” and the fact that (4) wisdom involves a commitment to one’s own well-being. Interestingly, Mengzi does this through a citation of *Analects* 4.1:

Kongzi said, “To dwell in benevolence is beautiful; if one chooses to not dwell in benevolence, how can one be wise?” Now, benevolence is Heaven’s honor, and the peaceful abode of humans. If one is not benevolent though nothing prevents it, this is to fail to be wise.

In other words, if one fails to appreciate the “beauty” of benevolence, or if one does not “dwell in” it when one can, then one is not really wise. Furthermore, benevolence is both an “honor” and our “peaceful abode.” So it is in our own interest to dwell in it. Failure to appreciate this and to act accordingly is a failure of wisdom.

Although we have seen many important differences between the views expressed in the *Mengzi* and those in the received text of the *Analects*, the four parts of the virtue of wisdom are in evidence in both works (cf. Chapter 2, §II.B).

## VI. MENGZI’S ARGUMENTS

In the intellectual context in which he operates, Mengzi’s philosophical position was remarkably powerful. Even for us today, many of the intuitions underlying Mengzi’s conception of ethics are simple yet compelling. Part of the appeal is the view that what is natural for humans is

what is healthy for them (in a broad sense of “healthy”) and that this is obviously worthwhile:

Suppose someone has a ring finger that is bent and will not straighten. It is not the case that it hurts or that it interferes with one’s activities. But if there is something that can straighten it, one will not consider the road from one end of the world to the other too far, because one’s finger is not as good as other people’s. If one’s finger is not as good as others people’s, one knows to dislike it. But if one’s heart is not as good as other people’s, one does not know to dislike it. This is what is called not appreciating the categories [of importance]. (6A12)

In the Conclusion to this book, I explain why I think a version of Mengzi’s position is defensible even today (Chapter 5, §III). However, we will understand Mengzi’s view better if we look at some of his own arguments with and against his contemporaries.

#### VI.A. Against Gaozi: A Young Philosopher Makes His Mark

The exchange between Mengzi and Gaozi (and their followers) in 6A1–5 is extremely interesting as a sample of argumentation. Famously, Arthur Waley (who is followed in this by Munro and Hansen) dismisses Mengzi’s arguments as incompetent: “As a controversialist [Mengzi] is nugatory. The whole discussion (Book VI) about whether Goodness and Duty are internal or external is a mass of irrelevant analogies.”<sup>109</sup> However, I agree with those (including Lau, Nivison, and Shun) who find Mengzi’s arguments in this exchange to typically be quite incisive.

Part of what is so interesting but also potentially confusing is that we see in these passages a contrast between two equally legitimate but very different styles of argumentation. Gaozi, like many Western philosophers, appeals to our intuitions. He offers us metaphors that he thinks will seem plausible to us, and he gives examples, expecting (or hoping) that we will think the same things about them that he does. This is a very common philosophical method, especially in ethics. (If Gaozi were speaking in English, we would expect him to often say things like, “But

<sup>109</sup> Waley, *Three Ways of Thought in Ancient China*, p. 194. Hansen claims that Mengzi “distorts and bungles the form [of argument he uses] to the point we cannot even imagine how he might have been tempted to think it was valid” (*Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, p. 192, emphasis in original). But here we need to remind ourselves of the principles of charity and humanity: if we “cannot even imagine how” someone “might have been tempted to think” what we attribute to him, we have extremely strong reason for believing that our interpretation is wrong. (See Chapter 1, §I.A.)

surely . . .,” “Wouldn’t you say that . . .?” and “Don’t you think . . .?”) In contrast, Mengzi is using a more hard-headed approach, one that is also common in the West. When he is confronted with Gaozi’s examples or appeals to intuitions, Mengzi then shows that Gaozi’s metaphors and examples don’t prove what Gaozi wants them to prove. On the other hand, Mengzi does *not*, in his debate with Gaozi, show that his own position is correct. This is, I think, part of the reason that the quality of his arguments in this debate has been challenged. But Mengzi is not trying to prove his own position in these passages. He is merely criticizing Gaozi’s position. This is a legitimate philosophical activity in its own right. It is also one that is very common for younger philosophers, who may spend time criticizing the views of more senior philosophers before developing their own position in full detail. This fits in with two suggestions made by David Nivison. He notes that “the arguments in book 6 read like the record of Mencius making his mark by successfully attacking well-known positions of an older, established philosopher.”<sup>110</sup> In addition, it is possible that the Gaozi who appears here in *Mengzi* Book 6 is the same as the Gaozi who is shown in the Mohist Synoptic Chapters debating Mozi. But this would necessitate that the *Mengzi* 6 discussions occur between a very old Gaozi and a fairly young Mengzi. Note also that Mengzi’s use of a water analogy to illustrate human goodness (6A2) seems like a slightly more simplistic formulation of his view on human nature than the one we find in some other passages (such as 2A2 or 2A6). Water will flow downward as long as it is given the opportunity to do so. This contrasts with Mengzi’s agricultural metaphors, which suggest that active cultivation is necessary (at least in most cases) to fully develop the human potential for virtue. The difference could be explained if Mengzi was at an earlier stage in his career in the 6A1–5 (and possibly 6A6) dialogues. Consequently, I am discussing these arguments first. (Nonetheless, nothing in my interpretation will suffer if it turns out that Mengzi engaged in these debates later in his career.)

#### VI.A.1. *Human Nature: Mengzi 6A1–3*

In order to understand Mengzi’s exchanges with Gaozi regarding human nature, we should remind ourselves of what xìng 性, “nature,” meant for them. As we saw in §I above, the natures of different kinds of things differ; this is part of what makes them different kinds of things. (This point will be especially important in Mengzi’s argument against Gaozi in 6A3.) In

<sup>110</sup> Nivison, “Philosophical Voluntarism in Fourth-Century China,” p. 124.

addition, things with natures have distinctive innate qualities or dispositions. (This point will be especially important in Mengzi's argument against Gaozi in 6A2.)

Gaozi's position is that human nature has neither virtuous inclinations nor vicious inclinations. He thinks that human nature consists of sensual appetites and presumably also whatever other activities (e.g., metabolizing) are necessary for the life of an animal. Gaozi does not, however, oppose the cultivation of virtue. He believes that humans can and should become benevolent and righteous. Becoming virtuous is a process of reforming our nature in an artificial way. Thus described, Gaozi's position seems remarkably close to that which Xunzi will develop and defend later. Consequently, the debate between Mengzi and Gaozi over human nature gives us a sense for how Mengzi might have criticized Xunzi, had he ever argued against him.<sup>111</sup> However, Xunzi said that human nature is "bad" (è 惡), whereas Gaozi seems to think that it is ethically neutral. I think there is more than a terminological difference here. Xunzi suggested that becoming virtuous was an arduous process. In contrast, Gaozi's metaphors suggest that becoming virtuous is fairly easy. Indeed, Mengzi suggests (2A2.15) that, according to Gaozi, virtue is something that one can simply "seize."

### 6A1

Gaozi said, "Human nature is like a willow tree; righteousness is like cups and bowls. To take human nature and make it benevolent and righteous is like taking a willow and making it into cups and bowls."

Mengzi responded, "Can you follow the nature of the willow and make it into cups and bowls? You must forcibly injure it, and only then make it into cups and bowls. If you must forcibly injure the willow to make it into cups and bowls, then must you also forcibly injure people to make them benevolent and righteous? Your doctrine will certainly lead the whole world to regard benevolence and righteousness as a terrible thing."

To explicate his position, Gaozi compares making a person benevolent and righteous to carving wood into cups and bowls. This seems like a

<sup>111</sup> Recall also from §I of this chapter that Xunzi held an innate conception of human nature, whereas Mengzi held a developmental view. According to the developmental view, the nature of a thing is the qualities that such a thing will develop if uninjured and given an environment that is healthy for the kind of thing it is. In contrast, on the innate view, the nature of a thing is the qualities that such a thing has from birth, prior to anything but the most minimal growth and cultivation. Gaozi is likely to have held an innate view. However, as I argued in the case of Xunzi and Mengzi, this does *not* make it impossible for Gaozi to have a substantive disagreement with Mengzi.



perfectly innocent simile, but Mengzi sees that Gaozi's analogy betrays a conceptual problem with his view of human nature. If benevolence and righteousness are alien to my nature – in other words, if the Way of Virtue is unnatural for me – why on earth would I want to become benevolent or righteous? Why deform the kind of creature I am in order to follow some externally imposed standards? This is precisely the sort of objection to following the Ruist (or Mohist) Way that the “Yangists” would raise. And it seems like a very plausible one.

Mengzi is not vulnerable to this objection, of course, since he believes that human nature has natural inclinations toward virtue. Becoming virtuous, for Mengzi, is simply fully realizing our natural potential. (Thus, Mengzi says that to follow the nature of a thing is to be like Sage King Yu [famous for his efforts at flood control], who “in guiding the waters, guided them where no effort was required” [4B26].) But Gaozi is open to the “Yangist” objection, and so is Xunzi. Xunzi's ingenious response is that we have self-interested reasons for transforming our nature. In other words, even in our current amoral state, we have good reason to become moral creatures. Whether Xunzi can make this argument plausible is an interesting question (but one that is outside the scope of this volume).

Logically speaking, the structure of Mengzi's argument is *modus tollens*. If human nature were like what Gaozi suggests, then becoming virtuous would be bad for people. But becoming virtuous is not bad for people. (This is a premise that Gaozi and Mengzi agree on.) Therefore, human nature is not like what Gaozi suggests.

## 6A2

Gaozi said, “Human nature is like swirling water. Make an outlet for it in the east and it flows east; make an outlet for it in the west and it flows west. The fact that human nature does not distinguish between what is good and what is not good is like the fact that water does not distinguish east and west.”

Mengzi responded, “Water admittedly does not distinguish between east and west, but does it not distinguish between up and down? The goodness of human nature is like water going down. There is no person without goodness; there is no water that does not go down. Now, if you strike water and make it jump, you can make it go past your forehead. If you block water and guide it, you can make it rest on a mountain. Is this really the nature of the water?! It is that way because of special circumstances. That people can be made to not be good is due to the fact that their nature is also like this.”

Gaozi specifically says that the water in question is “swirling” (tuān 湍). Consequently, we should probably not think of standing water, like in a barrel, which is made to flow by poking a hole in one side. Instead, we

should think of an underground spring or artesian well, whence water that is already bubbling or active underground is released.

Mengzi's argument here has been much criticized. Since Gaozi is using the water analogy only to illustrate his own stance on human nature, how can Mengzi mount a genuine argument against Gaozi's position by simply using the same analogue to make a different point? We have clever rhetorical fireworks here, but do we actually have an argument?

In 6A1, Mengzi does not call into question the fact that the analogy Gaozi uses is an accurate model of Gaozi's view on human nature. Instead, Mengzi accepts Gaozi's analogy as a representation of Gaozi's own view, but he then shows that Gaozi's view of human nature has consequences that neither Gaozi nor Mengzi would want to accept. In 6A2, Gaozi gives a different analogy, hoping to evade Mengzi's earlier objection. This time, Mengzi calls into question the adequacy of Gaozi's analogy as a representation of Gaozi's position.

In order to see what is at issue, consider the following question. Why does Gaozi use water as an analogue instead of, say, clay or metal? I believe there is a good reason for Gaozi's choice. Not everything has a "nature" (xìng 性), per se. Neither clay nor metal has a normal, healthy course of development. Consequently, they do not have a "nature." But we know that at least some early Chinese thinkers believed that water *has* a nature: "It is the nature of water to be clear. Earth disturbs it, hence it is unable to be clear."<sup>112</sup> And muddy water will become clear, unless it is subject to repeated agitation (i.e., the application of force). Had Gaozi picked clay or metal as his analogue and pointed out that you do not injure clay whether you make it into a cup or a bowl, Mengzi would have easily responded that this shows nothing about human beings, since humans (unlike clay) have a nature. (Remember that Mengzi and Gaozi disagree over what human nature is like, but they agree that humans do have a nature. In this, they both disagree with the Mohists.) So Gaozi uses water as an analogue in an effort to illustrate the fact that one can take a thing that has a nature and make it develop in different ways, without violating the nature of that thing.

Now consider water flowing from a spring or artesian well. Even though it does not have any preference for east or west, we cannot make it flow east or west without either following its natural preference for downward motion or using force to overcome that downward preference. This is more than just a nonessential deficiency of Gaozi's analogy. In order

<sup>112</sup> *Lüshi chunqiu*, *Jibu* 1.2, "The Root of Life" (cited in §I of this chapter).

to avoid the objection that Mengzi raised in 6A1, Gaozi is ignoring the natural tendencies of water (e.g., a preference for flowing downward), without which it would not even have the property that Gaozi does focus on (i.e., indifference to flowing east or west). So Gaozi's analogy fails to take into account the fact that, in general, shaping a thing that has a nature must either make use of that thing's nature or violate it. Any analogy Gaozi made between cultivating virtue in humans and modifying a thing with a nature would have the same problem, and any analogy to a thing without a nature would be a disanalogy.

Perhaps Gaozi would object that water does *not* have a nature. After all, he says that human nature is like water; he does not say that human nature is like the nature of water. *Mengzi* 6A3 may even suggest this very response, since Gaozi begins that passage by saying that "Being alive is what is meant by 'nature.'" If this is what "nature" means, then water does not have a nature, since it is not alive.<sup>113</sup> But this response is fatal for Gaozi's position. If Gaozi tries to evade Mengzi's objection in 6A2 by claiming that water does not have a nature, then Mengzi will immediately reply that Gaozi's analogy is irrelevant: one cannot show a fact about something that has a nature (like a human) by appealing to something that does not have a nature. So Mengzi's reply to Gaozi's analogy in 6A2 assumes that water has a nature, but Gaozi's analogy has to assume this itself (or else it is irrelevant to the issue of human nature).

So far in Book 6, Gaozi has offered two analogies to illustrate his conception of human nature. Mengzi has shown a problem with each of these analogies. The first analogy, in 6A1, revealed that Gaozi's position was open to the stock "Yangist" objection to ethical cultivation. In 6A2, Mengzi argued that Gaozi cannot simultaneously hold that there is such a thing as human nature and that human nature is indifferent to ethics, but then claim that making a human ethical fails to violate any natural inclinations. Also in 6A2, Mengzi uses the water analogy to gesture toward his own conception of human nature. Mengzi has not proven in this passage that this conception is correct. But I don't think that this was his intention. It is open to Gaozi to criticize Mengzi's analogy or ask Mengzi to justify his view of human nature. Gaozi passes on this opportunity and instead attempts to state his position without the aid of metaphors.

### 6A3

Gaozi said, "Being alive is what is meant by 'nature.' "

<sup>113</sup> I owe this observation to an anonymous referee.

Gaozi's use of analogies to explicate his position has only gotten him into trouble, so now he switches to a more literal exposition. Using a standard construction in Classical Chinese for explicating a term (X 之謂 'Y'), Gaozi explains what he takes human nature to be.<sup>114</sup> Shēng 生 can mean "to live" (which is how I have translated it), but it can also mean "to give birth to" or "to create," which has led some to translate Gaozi's explication, "The innate is what is meant by 'nature.'"<sup>115</sup> It is conceivable that this is what Gaozi meant, and it would be consistent with the innate conception of *xing*. Since Mengzi has the developmental conception of *xing*, he might have been speaking at cross-purposes with Gaozi, as Xunzi would later speak at cross-purposes to Mengzi's position. However, Mengzi will raise an objection in this section that will prove problematic for Gaozi on either an innate or a developmental conception of *xing*.

So what kinds of activities does Gaozi have in mind by "being alive"? I can imagine a minimal, a moderate, or a maximal construal of what is involved in "being alive." Minimally, he might mean by "being alive" simply the kinds of activities that we associate with metabolizing: ingesting nutrition of some kind, processing it to continue bodily functioning, and eliminating waste. (In this sense, "being alive" [生] is to be contrasted with "being dead" [死].) At a moderate level of complexity, Gaozi might mean by "being alive" not only metabolizing but also the associated desires for food and sex. That Gaozi has this second notion in mind is suggested by his comment coming up in 6A4 that "Hunger and lust are our nature." Maximally, Gaozi could mean by "being alive" all the activities that are distinctive of the life of a particular type of creature, whatever they may be. It is unlikely that he has the maximal conception in mind, for two reasons. First, the maximal conception would not serve to distinguish his view of human nature from that of Mengzi. Mengzi would agree that the nature of a living thing is the distinctive activities of a healthy member of that kind; he and Gaozi just disagree over what those activities are. Second, as Mengzi's line of questioning reveals, Gaozi takes "being alive" to be something that is the same across different species. In fact, it is this claim that allows Mengzi to do a *reductio ad absurdum* of his position. So my guess is that Gaozi held the moderate position: human nature is to live, in the sense of metabolizing and having basic desires, as for food and sex.

<sup>114</sup> We have three instances of the X 之謂 'Y' construction in the opening of *The Mean*: 天命之謂性。率性之謂道。修道之謂教。 "The Heavenly Mandate is what is meant by the 'nature.' To follow the nature is what is meant by the 'Way.' To cultivate the Way is what is meant by 'education.'"

<sup>115</sup> For example, Hinton, *Mencius*, p. 198.

Mengzi's strategy is to show that Gaozi's definition would entail that the natures of different kinds of animals are the same. This is not only a conclusion that both Gaozi and Mengzi would reject, it is also inconsistent with the way *xing* is used in Classical Chinese. (As the *Lüshi chungiu* observes, "The nature of an ox is not like a sheep; the nature of a sheep is not like a pig.")<sup>116</sup> In making this argument, Mengzi appeals to an implicit premise: "being alive for a dog is the same as being alive for an ox; being alive for an ox is the same as being alive for a person" (犬之生猶牛之生, 牛之生猶人之生). Mengzi takes this premise to be so obvious as not to be worth stating. It would seem, at first glance, that Mengzi could go immediately from Gaozi's first statement ("being alive is what is meant by 'nature'") and this implicit premise to the conclusion that "the nature of a dog is the same as the nature of an ox; the nature of an ox is the same as the nature of a person." So why doesn't he?

As the Neo-Mohists would later explain in some detail, (1) there are contexts in which we identify one thing with another, and something that is the case regarding the former thing is also the case regarding the latter. (The phrase the Neo-Mohists use for this is 或乃是而然, "X is identical with this and it is the case.") However, (2) there are also contexts in which we identify one thing with another, and what is the case regarding the former thing is *not* the case regarding the latter. (The phrase the Mohists use for this is 或是而不然, "X is this but it is not the case.") As examples of the former kind of context, the Mohists adduce

(a) A white horse is a horse. To ride a white horse is to ride horses.

(b) A black horse is a horse. To ride a black horse is to ride horses.<sup>117</sup>

As examples of the second kind of context, the Mohists give

(c) Her younger brother is a handsome man, but loving her younger brother is not loving a handsome man.

(d) Robbers are people, but abounding in robbers is not abounding in people.<sup>118</sup>

Inference (c) is considered unwarranted because saying that "she loves a handsome man" suggests romantic love, which is not what she feels for her brother. Inference (d) is considered unwarranted because it might be true that we "abound in robbers" (as a fraction of our population),

<sup>116</sup> *Lüshi chungiu*, *Lunbu* 23.5, "Obstructions" (cited in §I of this chapter).

<sup>117</sup> Translations by Graham, *Later Mohist Logic*, p. 485.

<sup>118</sup> Translations by Graham, *Later Mohist Logic*, p. 487. Translation of (c) modified slightly.

yet we have a small population (and hence do not “abound in people” overall).

So, when Gaozi says that “being alive is what is meant by ‘nature,’” Mengzi knows that he must be careful in drawing out any implications from this claim. If Mengzi says immediately, “Then is the nature of a dog like the nature of an ox, and is the nature of an ox like the nature of a person?” Gaozi, if he is clever, will respond, “This is a case in which something is a certain thing, but [what is so of the latter] is not so of it. Being alive for a dog is not being alive for an ox, and being alive for an ox is not being alive for a person” (此乃是而不然者也。犬之生非牛之生也, 牛之生非人之生也。).

So instead, Mengzi gets Gaozi to concede the points that he needs for his *reductio* one at a time:

Mengzi responded, “Do you mean that *being alive is what is meant by ‘nature’* is like *white is what is meant by ‘white’*?”

Gaozi said, “That is so.”

Here, Mengzi wants to establish whether Gaozi really intends to state what we would call a strict definition. This is important, because it is possible to use the X 之謂 ‘Y’ construction in a loose fashion, to explicate a term without strictly defining it. Mengzi uses the example of “white” because it is a stock example of a term that functions the same regardless of the context of occurrence. This is illustrated by the Neo-Mohists’ sample sentence (a) above, as well as the following passage from the Neo-Mohist essay “Names and Objects”:

Names and objects do not connect necessarily. If this stone is white, when you break up this stone all of it is the same as what is white; but even though this stone is big, it is not the same as what is big.<sup>119</sup>

So if we can say of a stone that it is “white,” we can say of a piece of the stone that it is “white.” But just because we can say of the stone that it is “big,” we cannot necessarily say of a piece of the stone that it is “big.”

Having agreed that he wishes to give a strict definition, it will be hard for Gaozi to disagree with Mengzi’s next claim. However, Mengzi wants Gaozi to explicitly agree to the next claim, to close off any possible avenue of escape.

Mengzi asked, “Is the white of white feathers like the white of white snow, and is the white of white snow like the white of white jade?”

Gaozi said, “That is so.”

<sup>119</sup> Graham, *Disputers*, p. 151.

To reiterate, the preceding is connected to the following by the implicit assumption that “being alive for a dog is the same as being alive for an ox, and being alive for an ox is the same as being alive for a person”:

Mengzi said, “Then is the nature of a dog like the nature of an ox, and is the nature of an ox like the nature of a person?”

This is, of course, a rhetorical question. Mengzi thinks it follows from what Gaozi has said so far that the nature of a dog is like the nature of an ox, and the nature of an ox is like the nature of a person. However, the answer that Mengzi assumes Gaozi (or anyone else) would give to his rhetorical question is “No, the nature of a dog is not like the nature of an ox, and the nature of an ox is not like the nature of a person.” But then Gaozi’s views on human nature have consequences that neither Gaozi nor anyone else would be willing to accept.

At this point, it is not clear how Gaozi can escape without abandoning one of the premises he has already agreed to. Suppose Gaozi bites the bullet and says that the natures of a dog, ox, and person are all the same? This will seem absurd to his audience. Suppose he makes explicit and then denies Mengzi’s implicit premise, saying, “Being alive for a dog is not like being alive for an ox, nor is being alive for an ox like being alive for a person”? This would effectively block Mengzi from drawing the conclusion that he wants to draw. However, it is extremely difficult to see how Gaozi can deny Mengzi’s implicit premise, given what he has already agreed to. He has already agreed that “being alive is what is meant by ‘nature’” is like “white is what is meant by ‘white.’” He has agreed that, in the case of white, this means that the whiteness of a white feather is the same as the whiteness of white snow, which is the same as the whiteness of white jade. How can he then deny that “being alive” connects with the same thing in each context?<sup>120</sup>

#### VI.A.2. *Internality versus Externality*: Mengzi 6A4–5

The debate in the next passage from Book 6, between Mengzi and Gaozi (and their disciples) over the internality or externality of benevolence and righteousness, has vexed interpreters. The sticking point is what it means to say that righteousness (or benevolence) is “external” (wài 外) as opposed to “internal” (nèi 内). Tantalizingly, there are

<sup>120</sup> Note that, despite the apparent similarity of Mengzi’s concerns in 6A3 to the issues discussed by the Neo-Mohists, he still does not use the term *míng* 名 here, even though it seems an obvious place to invoke it. This is evidence that the technical sense of that term had not developed in Mengzi’s time. And that is evidence that the doctrine of “correcting names” from *Analects* 13.3 is post-Mengzian (Chapter 2, §I.B.2).

other early texts that discuss this issue. However, what they have to say seems unhelpful. The “Admonitions” chapter of the *Guanzi* states, “Benevolence comes from within. Righteousness is expressed without.” However, there is no hint in that text of what these distinctions mean. The Guodian manuscript “The Six Forms of Virtue” *does* explain what it means to say that benevolence is internal and righteousness is external. It is essentially an expression of Ruist “love with distinctions.” However, as Paul Goldin notes, “nowhere in *Mencius* 6A does [Gaozi] make an argument even remotely resembling this one.” It seems that we are left with *Mengzi* 6A4–5 as our primary source for understanding what the Gaozians and the Mengzians meant by the internal/external distinction.<sup>121</sup>

Kwong-loi Shun ably summarizes the three major previous interpretations of what it would mean for righteousness (*yi*) to be internal:

- (1) an act is *yi* only if it is performed not just because it is proper, but because the agent is fully inclined to so act. . . . (2) that human beings already share *yi* as one of the four desirable attributes or are already disposed to *yi* behavior. . . . (3) that one’s knowledge of *yi* derives from certain features of the heart/mind.<sup>122</sup>

Interpretation (1) makes the internality of *yi* be about the *motivation* with which an *yi* action is performed. Interpretation (2) makes the internality of *yi* be about the *innateness* of *yi*. Interpretation (3) makes the internality of *yi* be about the *epistemology*, or source of one’s knowledge, of *yi*. Shun favors the third interpretation. I favor something like the first interpretation. I shall refer to this as Zhu Xi’s interpretation, since – as Shun notes – Zhu Xi was an early proponent of it.<sup>123</sup>

<sup>121</sup> See *Guanzi* X.26, “Admonitions,” translation by Rickett, *Guanzi*, p. 379; *Guodian Chumu zhujian*, p. 188 (“Liude,” strips 26–30); Goldin, “Xunzi in the Light of the Guodian Manuscripts,” p. 54.

<sup>122</sup> Shun, *Mencius*, pp. 98–99. Kim-Chong Chong offers yet a fourth interpretation: that the Mengzians are simply presenting a *reductio ad absurdum* of the entire external/internal distinction as framed by the Gaozians. On Chong’s reading, the Mengzians agree that benevolence is internal only hypothetically, for the sake of the argument. (See Chong, “Mengzi and Gaozi on *Nei* and *Wai*.”) Although Chong’s argument is intriguing, I believe that my interpretation is to be preferred because it is consistent with the fact that the Mengzians never explicitly repudiate the internal/external distinction itself.

<sup>123</sup> “In treating people as elderly, the feeling (心) of genuine respect manifests itself from within, and one makes it fully genuine and respects them. This is why it is called ‘internal’” (Zhu Xi, *Zhuzi yulei*, vol. 4, p. 1379). (I hope it is obvious by this point that I would not endorse everything that Zhu Xi says about this passage or any other.)



VI.A.2.A. A DEFENSE OF ZHU XI'S READING. I believe that the key to understanding the exchange is an often-overlooked comment in 6A5. Mengzi's follower Gongduzi is asked why he regards righteousness as internal, and he responds, "I act out of my respect, hence I say that it is internal" (行吾敬, 故謂之內也). This suggests that, if righteousness is internal, acting out of genuine righteousness must require, in addition to certain kinds of behavior, being motivated, at least in part, by the emotional attitude of "respect." If that is what it would mean for righteousness to be *internal*, what would it mean for it to be *external*? Conceivably, it could mean any one of several things.<sup>124</sup> However, as I think the discussion in 6A4–5 will show, the most plausible interpretation is that, if righteousness is external, acting out of genuine righteousness requires only certain kinds of behavior and does not require acting out of any particular emotion. This construal of "internal" and "external" makes sense out of the entire debate. We can see why Gaozi and his followers might have found plausible the arguments that they give, and we can see why Mengzi and his followers consider their own counter-arguments decisive.

Righteousness is a virtue that requires actions in a broad range of situations. At least at first glance, it seems implausible that acting correctly in each of those situations requires acting out of some particular emotion. It is this intuition that Gaozi and his followers appeal to. On the other hand, the power of the Mengzians' arguments lies in the fact that it is difficult to definitively establish that there *cannot* be an emotional attitude appropriate to each situation requiring righteousness (even though there is great variation in details between the situations).

The Gaozians appeal to the intuition that righteousness is a reaction to an external property. This property can be found in a wide variety of situations in which the object of my response stands in no special relation to me. For example, righteousness demands that I treat an elderly person from the state of Qin with deference, it demands that I treat an elderly person from the state of Chu with deference, it demands that I treat

<sup>124</sup> I assume that the Mengzians and the Gaozians agree that at least *part* of righteousness is acting in certain ways. Consequently, the claim at issue is whether "acting out of genuine righteousness requires being motivated by the emotional attitude of respect." The denial of this claim is that "acting out of genuine righteousness does *not* require being motivated by the emotional attitude of respect." This could mean that acting out of genuine righteousness requires acting out of some *other* emotional attitude, or it could mean that acting out of genuine righteousness does not require acting out of any particular emotional attitude. Given what the Gaozians and the Mengzians say in their discussions, the latter interpretation seems more plausible to me.

an elderly person from my village with deference. It is implausible, the Gaozians are implying, that there be any emotion that is triggered by all and only the various contexts in which righteousness is required. In contrast, benevolence involves loving one's own family members. If I fail to feel that love, I am not really being benevolent toward members of my family. Unlike in the case of righteousness, benevolence is not triggered simply by an external property, because I love my own younger brother but not (necessarily) someone else's younger brother. Hence, benevolence has to do with how you feel, whereas righteousness has to do with an external property that is unrelated to how you feel.

The Gaozian intuition is plausible, but the Mengzians respond that, even if righteousness is triggered by an external property (such as elderliness) that someone else has, that does not show that a righteous person does not need to have a particular emotional response to that property.

Let's look at how this works out in detail.

#### 6A4

Gaozi said, "Hunger and lust are [human] nature. Benevolence is internal; it is not external. Righteousness is external; it is not internal."

There are two main lines of interpretation here. Perhaps Gaozi is saying that the desires for food and sex, as well as benevolence, are all part of human nature. "Internal" would then be another way of saying that they are part of human nature, whereas "external" would mean that they are not part of human nature. This interpretation has two strengths. First, it explains why Gaozi moves without transition from talking about "nature" to the internal/external distinction. Second, hunger and lust are described as "nature" in this passage, and hunger is used as an illustration of internality later in the discussion.

Neither of these factors is definitive, though. Regarding the first point, it may be that Gaozi's comment on hunger and lust is a final response to Mengzi's attempted *reductio ad absurdum* in 6A3. Having failed to successfully answer Mengzi's objections to his view of human nature, Gaozi concludes with one final statement of that view, "Hunger and lust are our nature," before changing the topic. His comments on benevolence and righteousness would then be the start of a new topic.<sup>125</sup> We can hardly blame Gaozi for introducing a new topic, since the argument over human

<sup>125</sup> I believe this is Zhu Xi's view: "The first part, 'Hunger and lust are [human] nature' is one section; the second part, 'Benevolence is internal, righteousness is external' is another section. Hence when Mengzi disputes Gaozi, he just says, 'Why do you say that benevolence is internal and righteousness is external?'" (*Zhuzi yulei*, vol. 4, p. 1378).

nature is not going well for him. And it is perfectly legitimate for Gaozi to bring up this issue at some point, since he presumably knows that he and Mengzi disagree over this topic as well. Perhaps he thinks that he will do better arguing over this.

The fact that hunger is later used as an illustration of internality also does not disprove my interpretation, because it may be that hunger is both a part of nature *and* internal. Indeed, hunger does seem like a part of human nature if anything is, and given the characterization of “internal” that I propose, hunger would also be internal, because it doesn’t make any sense to say that one acts out of hunger without having any particular motivation.

Furthermore, there are two strong reasons, which seem to me definitive, for holding that Gaozi is not saying in the opening of 6A4 that benevolence is a part of human nature. The first is that two other passages strongly suggest that Gaozi thought human nature had no virtuous inclinations of any kind. Gaozi himself says in 6A1 that “To make human nature benevolent and righteous is like making a willow tree into cups and bowls.” Here, both righteousness and benevolence are compared to artificial reformations of our nature. Gaozi cannot hold this if he also thinks that benevolence is a part of our nature. In addition, in 6A6, Gongduzi characterizes Gaozi’s position by saying, “Human nature lacks what is good and lacks what is not good.”

The second major problem with reading “internal” as a synonym for “part of nature” is that it saddles Gaozi with a very convoluted way of making his point. If Gaozi meant what the first interpretation suggests, why didn’t he simply say, “Hunger, lust, and benevolence are our nature” (食色仁皆性也) or “Hunger, lust, and benevolence are internal” (食色仁皆内也), or even “Hunger, lust, and benevolent are both our nature and internal” (食色仁又性又内也)? Surely Gaozi wishes to mark some distinction here by talking about “nature” in one sentence and “internal” in the other? This is the interpretation I prefer.

So, on my reading, Gaozi wishes to make the following points in the passage above. Hunger and lust are human nature. (This does not rule out their also being internal.) In distinction, benevolence and righteousness (though neither is a part of human nature) may be distinguished in that benevolence is internal, whereas righteousness is external.

Mengzi said, “Why do you say that benevolence is internal and righteousness external?”

Gaozi said, “They are elderly, and we treat them as elderly. It is not that they are elderly because of us. Similarly, that is white, and we treat it as white, according to its being white externally to us. Hence, I say it is external.”

Mengzi does not express any confusion here about what it would *mean* to state that benevolence is internal whereas righteousness is external. His question (at least as Gaozi understands it) is about what reason Gaozi has for believing that benevolence meets the standard for internality (whatever it is), whereas righteousness does not.

Gaozi's response is to draw an analogy between elderliness and whiteness. In each case, there is a property a thing has (it even seems natural for us to say in English that there is an "external property of a thing") that makes appropriate certain kinds of reactions from us (at least in certain contexts). He is elderly. If you encounter him on the street, you should bow to him first and bow more deeply than he does. That stone is white. If I ask you to bring me a white stone for my garden, you should bring me that one and not the black stone next to it.

Furthermore, in each case, the property seems independent of us. The elderly do not have elderliness because of us, any more than white things are white because of us. Elderliness and whiteness are, we might say, absolute or nonrelational qualities. (There is a sense in which "elderliness" is a relational quality. If I am forty years old, I am elderly relative to an eighteen-year-old, but a sixty-year-old is elderly relative to me. However, this is not a fact that either the Gaozians or the Mengzians appeal to.)

Gaozi seems to be appealing to an implicit premise that, if a property is independent of us, we cannot be expected to have a particular emotion in response to that property. There is, at least at first glance, a certain plausibility to the suggestion that we cannot be expected to feel the same way about each and every thing that has a property that is itself totally independent of us. However, Mengzi replies,

[Elderliness] is different from whiteness. The whiteness of a [white] horse is no different from the whiteness of a gray-haired person. But surely we do not regard the elderliness of an old horse as being no different from the elderliness of an old person?

Furthermore, do you say that the one who is elderly is righteous, or that the one who treats another as elderly is righteous?

Mengzi gives two strong counterarguments here. Using our modern vocabulary, we can see that Mengzi both attacks one of Gaozi's premises and shows that Gaozi's argument is invalid.<sup>126</sup>

<sup>126</sup> To reiterate a point made in Chapter 1, §I.B.1, Mengzi does not need to think explicitly in terms of "premises" and "validity" to criticize Gaozi's argument in the way that I suggest, any more than Socrates or Plato did, before Aristotle invented the technical vocabulary of logic.

First, Mengzi notes that, contrary to what Gaozi suggests, there is a significant disanalogy between whiteness and elderliness. As we saw in the exchange in 6A3, whiteness is the paradigm of a quality that functions the same in every context of occurrence. The whiteness of a white feather, the whiteness of white snow, the whiteness of white jade, the whiteness of a white-haired (i.e., gray-haired) person, the whiteness of a white horse – treating it as white is the same in each case. However, this is not so with elderliness. An elderly horse has almost no value. It deserves minimal care. An elderly person, in contrast, is to be treated with respect and deference. Consequently, Gaozi’s argument depends on an assumption that is demonstrably mistaken.

Mengzi has done more than just score a minor debating point. I suggested that Gaozi’s underlying assumption is that we cannot be expected to have a particular emotional reaction to a property that is completely independent of us. But what Mengzi’s example shows is that our reaction to elderliness is selective. It *does* depend on us. In this respect, our reaction to elderliness is more like our selective reaction to younger brothers (see Gaozi’s next example) than it is like our reaction to whiteness.

Mengzi’s second point, although briefer, is the more devastating of the two. Put into modern terms, Mengzi points out that Gaozi’s argument is a non sequitur. Suppose it is true that there is some quality in things that is independent of our feelings and that makes righteous responses appropriate. It does not follow from this that acting righteously does not involve being motivated by a particular emotion. We are, after all, interested in what makes a person righteous in their responses to others. It might be true, for all Gaozi has said, that, while acting righteously involves an invariant response to an external property, it also requires that we respond to that property out of a particular emotion.

Gaozi replies,

My younger brother I love; the younger brother of a person from Qin I do not love. In this case, it is I who feel happy [because of my love for my brother]. Hence, I say that it is internal. I treat as elderly an elderly person from Chu, and I also treat as elderly my own elderly. In this case, it is the elderly person who feels happy. Hence I say that it is external.

Here, Gaozi drops the analogy between elderliness and whiteness and instead defends his position by an appeal to our intuitions over particular cases. This passage also gives us our first illustration of what it would mean, according to Gaozi, for a virtue to be “internal.” It is clear that the reference to loving one’s younger brother is meant to be an example

of benevolence: loving one's family members is a paradigmatic illustration of benevolence for a wide range of early philosophers. And notice that the illustration fits perfectly the interpretation of "internality" that I propose. Benevolence is internal because it involves emotions (love and happiness) that I have (i.e., that are internal to me). In contrast, righteousness is external because it requires only certain appropriate behavioral reactions to the elderliness of others.

Gaozi's argument is to invite us to consider the apparent disanalogy between a paradigmatic case of benevolence and a paradigmatic case of righteousness. Gaozi agrees with Mengzi that being genuinely benevolent requires acting out of a particular motivation. For example, I am not benevolent unless I love my younger brother and am made happy by his presence and well-being. It is entirely reasonable to require this of me, since it is easy to cultivate feelings of love for those who are close to oneself, like members of one's own family. However, contrast this with being righteous toward the elderly. Righteousness requires that I show deference to a wide variety of individuals, most of whom stand in no special relationship with me. For instance, every person who is elderly, regardless of anything else about them, must be treated by me with deference. It is simply not plausible, Gaozi suggests, that there is some emotional attitude that I must take toward each of these people, whenever I may happen to encounter him or her.

Why does Gaozi mention that, when I show deference to an elderly person, the elderly person will feel happy?<sup>127</sup> On my reading, this is not, strictly speaking, a requirement in order for righteousness to be external. It could conceivably be that righteousness is external even though nobody gets happiness out of people acting righteously. But then it would be very unclear what the point of righteousness is. Why be righteous if it doesn't give anyone pleasure? And, of course, Mengzi need not, and presumably does not, dispute that treating an elderly person with deference makes him or her happy. So Gaozi's comment about the happiness of the elderly person is helpful in further explicating his position, but it does not, in itself, act as a premise in his disagreement with Mengzi.

I should mention that there is an alternative reading for the above passage. What the received text gives as *yuè* 悅 "happy" could originally

<sup>127</sup> Shun sees it as a weakness of an interpretation like the one I propose that it has difficulty explaining the reference to the old person's pleasure (Shun, *Mencius*, p. 102). This paragraph is a response to that objection.

have been *shuō* 說 “explanation.” (In Mengzi’s era, the character 悅 did not exist. When we find it in the received text, this is because of the effort of later scribes to disambiguate an original text that had 說, which could be read either as *shuo*, “explanation,” or *yue*, “happy.” But the scribes could have been wrong.) The reading of *yue* 悅 as *shuo* 說 would give us the following translation of Gaozi’s rebuttal (with the lines that would be different in italics):

My younger brother I love; the younger brother of a person from Qin I do not love. In this case, *we take the explanation to lie in me*. Hence, I say that it is internal. I treat as elderly an elderly person from Chu, and I also treat as elderly my own elderly. In this case, *we take the explanation to lie in his elderliness*. Hence I say that it is external.

My interpretation works just as well (perhaps better) on this alternative reading. The fact that I love my younger brother, whereas I do not love the younger brother of a guy from Qin, is explained by something about me (i.e., how I feel). The fact that I treat as elderly an elderly person, whether they are from Chu or my own village, is explained simply by the fact that they are elderly. Gaozi is explicitly making the point that I think underlies his position: a virtue requires a particular emotion only if the object of the virtue stands in some special relationship with us.

Mengzi then retorts,

Savoring the roast of a person from Qin is no different from savoring my roast. So what you describe is also the case with objects. Is savoring a roast, then, also external?

Again, Mengzi shows that the form of Gaozi’s argument is fallacious. In order to show this, he uses an argumentative tool that is quite common in the West. He constructs an argument of the same form as the argument in question and shows that it is invalid. Since Gaozi’s argument has the same form as an argument that is obviously fallacious, Gaozi’s argument is also invalid.

Savoring roasted meat is paradigmatically internal since it involves our own internal motivations. Now, just as there are many elderly people in the world, so there are many roasted meats in the world. We would enjoy eating any of these roasted meats, regardless of where the meat happened to come from. There is nothing at all implausible about this. However, if what Gaozi had said about righteousness and the elderly were true, it would follow, by the same line of reasoning, that savoring a fine roast is

*external* and has nothing to do with our own feelings or desires. But this is monstrously implausible. Therefore, Gaozi's argument is fallacious.

In the next passage we see Mengzi in an interesting role: as "debate coach" to his disciple Gongduzi.

### 6A5

Meng Jizi asked Gongduzi, "Why do you say that righteousness is internal?"

Gongduzi responded, "I act out of my respect, hence I call it 'internal.'"

As I observed at the beginning of this section, we have here a very clear statement of what it would mean for righteousness to be internal: it involves not just behaving in a certain way, but also acting out of a particular emotion. In what follows, the strategy of Gaozi's follower Meng Jizi is to show that the object of the emotional attitude of respect diverges from the object of deferential treatment. Since righteousness requires deferential treatment of the elderly, this would show that righteousness is really not internal.

Meng Jizi asked, "If a fellow villager is older than your elder brother by one year, whom do you respect?"

Gongduzi responded, "I respect my elder brother."

Meng Jizi asked, "Whom do you pour wine for first?"

He responded, "I first pour wine for my fellow villager."

Meng Jizi said, "The latter is the one whom you respect, but the former is the one whom you treat as elderly. So it really is external; it does not come from the internal."

Meng Jizi appeals to Gongduzi's intuitions about how he would feel and act in two different situations in order to perform a *modus tollens* argument against him. Meng Jizi assumes, correctly, that Gongduzi feels respect for his own elder brother, but would (at a communal dinner) pour wine for a fellow villager before he would pour it for his own brother, since this is what righteousness requires in that situation. Two things are especially interesting about this exchange. First, Meng Jizi does not deny that Gongduzi has a feeling of respect or that it is commendable. He simply argues that this feeling is not relevant to evaluating whether a person is righteous. Second, Gongduzi does not actually deny that he feels respect toward the villager when he fills his cup with wine before his brother's cup. Given what he and Mengzi say later in this passage, it seems likely that Gongduzi *does* feel respect for the villager, but he sees a tension between saying this and his earlier admission that his elder brother is the object of his respect *as opposed to* a fellow villager who is



just a year older than his brother. In other words, the logic of Meng Jizi's argument is (with implicit premises in italics):

- P1. I always revere those whom I treat in a righteous manner. (Gongduzi's thesis regarding the internality of righteousness.)
- P2. *I can either revere my elder brother or a fellow villager but not both.*
- P3. I revere my elder brother. (Gongduzi's admission.)
- P4. I pour wine first for the fellow villager. (Gongduzi's admission.)
- P5. *To pour wine first for someone is to treat him as elderly.*
- P6. *To treat someone as elderly is to treat him in a righteous manner. (Implicit throughout 6A4 and 6A5.)*
  - P7. *I do not revere my fellow villager. (From P2 and P3.)*
  - P8. *I treat my fellow villager in a righteous manner. (From P4, P5 and P6.)*
- C. I do not always revere those whom I treat in a righteous manner. (Conclusion, from P7 and P8, which contradicts P1.)

So Gongduzi's initial thesis about the internality of righteousness (P1) along with what seem like some unobjectionable premises lead to a conclusion (C) which contradicts that thesis. Therefore, Gongduzi's thesis, it seems, must be wrong.

Gongduzi was unable to answer. He reported this to Mengzi. Mengzi said, "Ask him, 'Do you respect your uncle, or do you respect your younger brother?' He'll say, 'I respect my uncle.' Then you say, 'When your younger brother plays the role of the deceased in the sacrifice, then whom do you respect?' He'll say, 'I respect my younger brother.' Then you say, 'Where is your respect for your uncle?' And he'll say, 'This is just because of the role my brother occupies.' Then you also say, 'In the case you asked about earlier, it is because of the role a person occupies. Ordinary respect lies with my elder brother; temporary respect lies with my fellow villager.'"

Mengzi's strategy is ingenious. He sees that most of what Meng Jizi has assumed in his argument is uncontroversial. The only controversial assumption is what I have labeled P2 above: you can only revere one person. So Mengzi gives Gongduzi an example of a case that has the following properties. (1) It is intrafamilial. This is important because the Gaozians seem to regard other family members as the appropriate objects of certain emotions. Thus, love for one's brother is taken as a paradigm of an internal reaction in 6A4. And in 6A5, Meng Jizi had not denied that reverence for one's elder brother was internal. (He denied only that righteous behavior always occurs with reverence.) So Meng Jizi is unlikely to deny that one reveres one's own uncle. (2) The example Mengzi gives also involves reverence at an ancestral sacrifice. If someone

in Mengzi's historical context believes that reverence is ever an appropriate attitude, they will think that it is appropriate at an ancestral sacrifice. And at least in some rituals, the object of that reverence will be the deceased as represented by another family member.

Consequently, Meng Jizi is extremely unlikely to deny that he typically reveres his uncle but does revere his younger brother when the brother plays the role of the deceased in a ritual sacrifice. Once one has acknowledged that one's reverence can legitimately shift from person to person, any plausibility that P2 has is lost. Mengzi believes that the reason (gù 故) Meng Jizi will offer for the fact that reverence can shift is that the role (wèi 位) a person plays varies. It is interesting that Mengzi would expect Meng Jizi to give such a specific answer to this question. For the reasons that I gave above, Mengzi could count on him answering the earlier questions in the way that Mengzi expected. But how does Mengzi know that he will mention "roles"? There are at least two possible explanations. It may be that the appeal to "roles" was well established in ethical discussions during Mengzi's era, so that it would seem to be an obvious move for him to make. However, we have no texts outside of this one that use "role" as if it were a well-known technical term. Alternatively, it may be that Mengzi and his disciples "tidied up" the debate afterwards, explaining the shift in reverence using their own vocabulary. However, it does not affect the power of Mengzi's argument if the latter is the case. Meng Jizi has admitted that reverence can shift from person to person. Whether he phrases this in terms of "roles" is not essential. By parity of reasoning, Meng Jizi will have to allow that Gongduzi's reverence can similarly shift from his older brother to a fellow villager, if the context varies.

When Meng Jizi had heard all this, he said, "Whether you respect your uncle or respect your younger brother it is still respect. It really is external; it does not come from the internal."

Gongduzi responded, "On a winter day one drinks hot broth; on a summer day one drinks cool water. Are eating and drinking then also external?"

Meng Jizi acknowledges that one feels reverence in varying circumstances but appeals to the intuition that, since reverence varies with the situation, it is really a response to those circumstances rather than primarily about the feeling. This is a weak response to Gongduzi's argument. However, it is going to seem like an inadequate response on *any* interpretation of the debate that I can imagine. Meng Jizi's earlier argument, you will recall, attempted to show that "revering" and "treating as elderly" clearly diverged in certain cases: "The one whom you respect is the former, but

the one whom you treat as elder is the latter.” This was taken to provide evidence for the claim that righteousness “really is external.” At the *end* of 6A5, though, Meng Jizi has conceded that “revering” and “treating as elderly” do *not* have to diverge, because the “reverence” can track the “roles” (wèi 位) that people occupy. On any way of understanding the passage, Meng Jizi has almost completely conceded the argument.

Gongduzi’s response is quite to the point. He gives an example of a paradigmatic internal response: thirst. He notes that, like reverence, the object of thirst varies with the context. Consequently, there is no plausibility to the intuition that reverence must be external because it varies with the situation.

VI.A.2.B. KWONG-LOI SHUN’S OBJECTIONS. Recall that Kwong-loi Shun summarized three major interpretations of 6A4–5. I am defending a version of Zhu Xi’s interpretation (the first one Shun mentions). I argued at the beginning of my discussion of 6A4 against the second interpretation: the claim that righteousness is external is the same as the claim that it is not a part of human nature. Shun argues against Zhu Xi’s interpretation and in favor of a third interpretation, “which takes the internality of *yi* [righteousness] to be the claim that one’s recognition of what is *yi* derives from certain features of the heart/mind.”<sup>128</sup> Shun argues that his interpretation is to be preferred, because it can make sense of the entire dialogue between the Mengzians and the Gaozians, whereas an interpretation like Zhu Xi’s cannot.

For example, consider the second part of this statement by Gaozi from 6A4:

They are elderly, and we treat them as elderly. It is not that they are elderly because of us.

Shun says that, on Zhu Xi’s interpretation, “what we expect [Gaozi] to say is that in performing the typical *yi* act of treating someone as old, it is not that I am inclined to treat him as old. But it is difficult to read the line in this way.” It is difficult to read the line in that way, but the interpretation does not require that we do so. On the interpretation that I propose, Gaozi is not, in the above line, *stating* his conclusion that righteousness requires no particular emotion, but is rather *arguing* for his conclusion by providing a premise that he hopes Mengzi (and his audience) will accept. Gaozi is arguing that, because their elderliness is

<sup>128</sup> Shun, *Mencius*, pp. 103–4.

not dependent on us in any way, it is implausible that we need to feel any particular emotion when treating them as righteousness requires.

Shun also cites as problematic for Zhu Xi's interpretation the second half of the following statement by Mengzi from 6A4:

Savoring the roast of a person from Qin is no different from savoring my roast. So what you describe is also the case with objects. Is savoring a roast, then, also external?

Shun says that he finds it "puzzling" why Mengzi would say this last sentence if Zhu Xi's interpretation were correct. However, I find Mengzi's point here quite straightforward. He is, as I argued above, showing that the form of argument that Gaozi uses is unpersuasive because it leads to absurd conclusions. His last sentence is a rhetorical question. The assumed answer is, "No, savoring a roast is *not* external." But since we arrived at the false conclusion that it *is* external by using the same form of argument that Gaozi had used to try to show that righteousness is external, the form of argument that Gaozi used must be mistaken.

The third passage Shun cites as problematic for Zhu Xi's reading is the final exchange between Gongduzi and Meng Jizi in 6A5:

Meng Jizi, upon hearing all this, said, "If you respect your uncle, then it is respect. If you respect your younger brother, then it is respect. So it really is external. It does not come from the internal."

Gongduzi said, "On a winter day, one drinks broth. On a summer day, one drinks water. Are drinking and eating also, then, external?"

On Shun's reading, Meng Jizi is stating that "since the object of our greater respect varies with circumstances independent of us," it is more plausible to hold that "it is from these external circumstances that we derive the propriety of our treating certain people with greater respect."<sup>129</sup> I would say that Meng Jizi is stating that, since our respect varies with the roles people occupy, which are independent of us, it is more plausible to hold that righteousness is really about how we respond to those roles than it is about how we feel. On neither reading has Meng Jizi given a good argument. So neither reading does better than the other in making sense of Meng Jizi's response. But this is not surprising, since (as I noted earlier) Meng Jizi has conceded all that Gongduzi needs him to concede.

Gongduzi's final response to Meng Jizi actually seems more incisive on my reading than on Shun's (which is a slight, but not definitive,

<sup>129</sup> Shun, *Mencius*, p. 107.

advantage of the former reading). Shun notes that “unlike Mencius’s roast example . . . it is more plausible to say of [Gongduzi’s] example that the preferences involved are responses to external circumstances.”<sup>130</sup> However, on my reading, Gongduzi’s response shows very clearly that Mengzi is guilty of a non sequitur. The fact that we prefer hot broth on cold days and cool water on warm days shows that there is a paradigmatic internal reaction (tastes in food and drink) that clearly varies with the external situation. So there is no reason to think that righteousness is external merely because it varies with the external situation.

So I do not think that Shun’s objections to Zhu Xi’s reading are decisive. Nonetheless, Shun’s own interpretation of 6A4–5 is itself quite defensible. I see no definitive objection to it. However, I do believe that there is a comparative advantage to Zhu Xi’s interpretation over Shun’s. If Shun is right, no one, at any point in the debate in 6A4–5, ever comes even close to saying explicitly what the debate is really about. Never do the Gaozians ever say anything like “One recognizes the righteousness of treating them as elderly because of their elderliness” (以其長, 知長之之義), nor do the Mengzians say anything like “One recognizes the righteousness of treating them as elderly because of one’s feeling of respect” (以吾敬, 知長之之義 or 以敬之心, 知長之之義). This is certainly not a knock-down argument against Shun’s interpretation. However, if Zhu Xi’s interpretation is correct, we have one explicit statement of what is at issue (when Gongduzi says, “I act out of my respect, hence I say that it is internal”) and one example that mentions precisely what I take to be at issue (when Gaozi says, “I love my brother, but the brother of a man from Qin I do not love”). Consequently, I feel that Zhu Xi’s interpretation is more faithful to the text.

#### VI.B. Against the Mohists: 1A1, 6B4, and 3A5

Heaven, in producing the things in the world, causes them to have one source, but Yizi gives them two sources.

– Mengzi 3A5

Not to be moved by what one values . . . bespeaks a malady of the spirit. Not to value what moves one also bespeaks a malady of the spirit. Such a malady, or such maladies, can properly be called *moral schizophrenia* – for they are a split between one’s motives and one’s reasons.

– Michael Stocker

<sup>130</sup> Shun, *Mencius*, p. 108.

Mengzi presents a series of powerful arguments against Mohist consequentialism. They can be organized into three broad groups using modern philosophical vocabulary: Mohism is “self-effacing” (in Derek Parfit’s sense); Mohism has implications that are contrary to some of our deep ethical intuitions; Mohism is impractical because it runs counter to deeply ingrained human motivations.

The *Mengzi* opens with a passage that is quite intriguing and deserves more philosophical attention than it has previously received:

Mengzi had an audience with King Hui of Liang. The King said, “Venerable sir, you have not regarded hundreds of leagues too far to come, so you must have a means to profit my state.” Mengzi replied, “Why must Your Majesty speak of ‘profit’? Let there simply be benevolence and righteousness.”

Imagine how striking this event was in its original context! Mengzi would have walked up a stairway, leading to the raised platform on which King Hui’s throne sat, and would have been directly in front of the king. Various functionaries and advisors may also have been present, off to the side of the king. The setting is august and intended to be intimidating. King Hui’s question is polite and seemingly quite appropriate. So Mengzi’s challenging reply must have rung like a thunderbolt, startling those present. While everyone is reeling from Mengzi’s violation of decorum, he continues,

If Your Majesty says, “How can I profit my state?” the Counsellors will say, “How can I profit my clan?” and the scholars and commoners will say, “How can I profit myself?” Superiors and subordinates will seize profit from each other and the state will be endangered. When the ruler in a state with ten thousand chariots is assassinated, it will invariably be by a clan with a thousand chariots. When the ruler in a state with a thousand chariots is assassinated, it will invariably be by a clan with a hundred chariots. A thousand out of ten thousand or a hundred out of a thousand is certainly not a small amount. But if one merely puts righteousness last and profit first, no one will be satisfied without stealing more. Never have the benevolent left their relatives behind. Never have the righteous put their ruler last. Let Your Majesty speak only of benevolence and righteousness. Why must one speak of “profit”?

Mengzi’s argument turns on the bad consequences of the king emphasizing “profit,” even if it is the profit of his kingdom as a whole (and not just his own personal profit), and the good consequences of the king emphasizing “benevolence and righteousness.” Specifically, if the king emphasizes profit, it will lead others to aim at the profit of the social units to which they belong: Counsellors will aim at profiting their clans, and scholars and commoners will aim at profiting themselves. This

single-minded emphasis on profit will result in a society that is torn by strife because “no one will be satisfied without stealing more.”

In contrast, if the king emphasizes benevolence and righteousness, other people in society will also emphasize benevolence and righteousness. This will lead them to care for their own relatives (so the king’s kin will not turn against him and foment revolution) and also will mean that people will not be disloyal to their ruler. As Zhu Xi puts it, “if the people’s ruler personally puts into effect benevolence and righteousness and does not have a heart that seeks profit, then he will transform those beneath him.”<sup>131</sup>

Cheng Yi summarizes the thesis of this passage eloquently:

A gentleman never fails to desire profit, but if one is single-mindedly focused on profit, then it leads to harm. If there is only benevolence and righteousness, then one will not seek profit, but one will never fail to profit. At [the time the dialogue with King Hui occurred], the people of the world only sought profit and didn’t appreciate having benevolence and righteousness. Hence, Mengzi talked about benevolence and righteousness and didn’t talk about profit.<sup>132</sup>

Paradoxically, then, aiming at profit is *unprofitable*, whereas not aiming at profit is *profitable*. Thus, Mengzi is not condemning profit, or even the desire to achieve profit. However, the desire to obtain profit must, if it is to be successful, be subordinated to a focus on benevolence and righteousness.

Although this passage never mentions the Mohists specifically, it is probably directed against them.<sup>133</sup> Mengzi is objecting to being guided by lì 利, “profit” or “benefit,” but being guided by “benefit” is central to Mohist consequentialism. Chad Hansen is certainly right that *part* of Mengzi’s criticism is that publicly “saying” or “speaking of” (yuē 曰) “profit” is inconsistent with the goal of achieving profit. However, the issue in this passage must be more than just whether Mohist consequentialism will “fail a publicity test,” because Mengzi talks about things other than just “using the Mohist benefit-harm distinction *out loud*.”<sup>134</sup> He discusses what will “satisfy” (yàn 饜) people psychologically. We can see

<sup>131</sup> Zhu Xi, *Sishu jizhu*, commentary on *Mengzi* 1A1.

<sup>132</sup> Cited in Zhu Xi, *Sishu jizhu*, commentary on 1A1.

<sup>133</sup> I should qualify this: the argument of 1A1 will apply to anyone who emphasizes “profit,” even if they are not strictly speaking a Mohist, such as Song Keng (discussed later in this section).

<sup>134</sup> Hansen, *Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, p. 159. Emphasis in original. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 113–14.

Mengzi's interest in the connection between language and human psychological states even more clearly in a parallel passage from a later book. In 6B<sub>4</sub>, Mengzi has a discussion with a philosopher named Song Keng, who plans to persuade the rulers of the states of Qin and Chu to cease hostilities in their ongoing war by means of an appeal to the unprofitability of the war. Mengzi lauds Song Keng's goal, but criticizes his method:

If you persuade the kings of Qin and Chu by means of profit, the kings of Qin and Chu will set aside their armies because they delight in profit. This is for the officers of their armies to delight in being set aside because they delight in profit. Those who are ministers will embrace profit in serving their rulers. Those who are children will embrace profit in serving their fathers. Those who are younger brothers will embrace profit in serving their elder brothers. This is for rulers and ministers, fathers and children, elder and younger brothers to end up abandoning benevolence and righteousness. For people to embrace profit in their contact with one another, yet not be destroyed – such a thing has never happened.

If you persuade the kings of Qin and Chu by means of benevolence and righteousness, the kings of Qin and Chu will set aside their armies because of their delight in benevolence and righteousness. This is for the officers of their armies to delight in being set aside because they delight in benevolence and righteousness. Those who are ministers will embrace benevolence and righteousness in serving their rulers. Those who are children will embrace benevolence and righteousness in serving their fathers. Those who are younger brothers will embrace benevolence and righteousness in serving their elder brothers. This is for rulers and ministers, fathers and children, elder and younger brothers to abandon profit. For people to embrace benevolence and righteousness in their contact with one another, yet their ruler does not become a genuine king, such a thing has never happened. Why must one say "profit"?

Here, as in 1A<sub>1</sub>, the proper use of language is important, but Mengzi even more clearly is interested in how language (and presumably also corresponding behavior) influences the psychological states and behavior of others: people should "delight in" (yuè 悅 or lè 樂) and "embrace" (huái 懷) benevolence and righteousness rather than profit.

Thus, Mengzi's argument in 1A<sub>1</sub> and 6B<sub>4</sub> is that consequentialism (of the Mohist or any other variety) is self-effacing.<sup>135</sup> This is similar to one

<sup>135</sup> Hansen states that the argument of *Mengzi* 1A<sub>1</sub> is that Mohism is "self-effacing," and I am indebted to his work for showing the connection to Parfit. However, Hansen misstates what "self-effacing" means for Parfit. For Parfit, a theory S would be "self-effacing" just in case "S told everyone to cause himself to believe some other theory" (*Reasons and Persons*, p. 24, emphasis mine). In contrast, Hansen states that a theory is "self-effacing"



major line of critique of contemporary forms of consequentialism. One way in which consequentialists have replied is to develop *indirect* versions of consequentialism, according to which one develops, for consequentialist reasons, motivations and dispositions to follow rules that are not consciously guided by consequentialist considerations, but that will, in general, produce the correct consequences.<sup>136</sup> This is slightly different from the “rule consequentialism” that I mentioned in the Introduction (Chapter 1, §II.A). An “indirect consequentialist” is an act consequentialist who holds that the right action is always the action that maximizes good consequences, but she also acknowledges that consciously aiming at good consequences may not always be the best course of action. The next passage we shall consider might show a Mohist advocating a sort of indirect consequentialism.

Perhaps the most famous passage in which Mengzi challenges the Mohists is 3A5:

The Mohist Yi Zhi sought to see Mengzi through the help of Xu Bi. Mengzi said, “I am definitely willing to see him, but today I am ill. When my illness improves, I will go and see him. Yi Zhi does not have to come.” The next day, he again sought to see Mengzi. Mengzi said, “Today I still can [not] see him.”<sup>137</sup> But if one is not upright, the Way will not be manifest. I will make him upright.

“I have heard that Yizi is a Mohist. Mohists, in regulating bereavement, take frugality as their Way. Yizi longs (*sī* 思) to change the world (to the Mohist Way). Could it be that he honors (the Mohist practice), while regarding it as not right? Nonetheless, Yizi buried his parents lavishly, so he served his parents by means of what he demeans.”

Xuzi told Yizi this. Yizi said, “As for the Way of the Ruists, the ancients (tended the people) ‘like caring for a baby.’”<sup>138</sup> What does this saying mean?

just in case “Correctly following it may merely require not *publicly advocating* it” (*Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, p. 396n20, emphasis mine). Hansen claims that a self-effacing ethical system “declares *telling the truth* (about one’s accepting it) immoral by its own lights” (*ibid.*, p. 159, emphasis mine). Thus, for Parfit, a self-effacing theory directs one to not *believe* it, whereas for Hansen a self-effacing theory is one that we should *accept*, but not *publicly advocate*. Parfit refers to theories like the one Hansen describes as “esoteric,” not “self-effacing” (*Reasons and Persons*, p. 41).

<sup>136</sup> Sidgwick, *Methods of Ethics*, IV.ii.3, pp. 430–39.

<sup>137</sup> What Mengzi says according to the received Chinese text of this passage is “Today I can see him.” But then he never actually sees Yi Zhi. The entire discussion is conducted through an intermediary, Xu Bi. No commentator or translator that I know of notes this oddity, not even the eagle-eyed Zhu Xi. But I do not see how to make sense of the passage except by assuming that a “not” has fallen out of the passage.

<sup>138</sup> This is a line from the *Documents*, *Documents of Zhou*, “Announcement to Kang.” See Legge, *Shoo King*, p. 389.

I take it to mean that love is without distinctions, but it is bestowed beginning with one's parents."

Mengzi's initial challenge to Yi Zhi (also referred to as "Yizi," Master Yi) is clear: Mohism dictates a frugal burial, but Yi Zhi gave his parents a lavish burial, which seems more consistent with Ruist practice. Thus, Yi Zhi is guilty of hypocrisy. (He is not being *xìn* 信, "faithful.") In a contemporary Anglo-American philosophical context, this kind of charge would be embarrassing, but it would probably also be dismissed as *ad hominem*. In our culture, we do not expect ethical philosophers to be philosophers who are ethical. But the same is not true of the context in which Mengzi and Yi Zhi are operating. The Way is a guide to how one should actually live. If one does not live in accordance with it, one is not qualified to espouse it. In addition, the failure to live up to the Way one claims to follow raises the issue of whether it is even possible for anyone to follow it.

What is less clear is what the point is of Yi Zhi's reply to Mengzi. It seems likely that he is trying to justify his conduct in giving his parents a lavish burial. As a *zǐ* 子, "master," in his culture, he cannot simply ignore the issue as *ad hominem*. But how is what he says a justification for his conduct? The first part of his reply is a citation from a classic text, which Yi Zhi apparently interprets as meaning that the ancient sage kings treated the people as if they were their own children. Yi Zhi then cryptically comments, "love is without distinctions, but it is bestowed beginning with one's parents" (愛無差等。施由親始). I shall refer to this as "Yi Zhi's Maxim." Yi Zhi's Maxim has at least the following interpretations:

1. As a child, one first loves one's parents. However, as one grows to ethical maturity, one should learn (under the guidance of Mohist moral doctrines) to extend this love to everyone equally so that love no longer has any gradations or distinctions. (This elegant interpretation has been proposed by David Nivison.)<sup>139</sup>
2. One should be committed to loving everyone impartially. However, given the limitations of human psychology, it will lead to the best consequences if people are allowed to bestow greater affection on their parents. (This would be a version of indirect consequentialism.)

<sup>139</sup> Nivison, "Two Roots or One?" in *The Ways of Confucianism*.

The first interpretation has several advantages. It would explain why Yi Zhi says what he says, and it would not require much speculation about his beliefs beyond what is contained in his comment. In addition, it would show that at least one wing of Mohism had undergone a philosophically intelligible transition during Mengzi's era. As we saw (Chapter 3, §V.F), one weakness of early Mohism is that it has a very thin philosophical anthropology and regards the structure of human motivations as highly malleable. Yi Zhi's position, as interpreted by option (1), is a modification of Mohism that gives a more plausible account of how humans become agents of "impartial love": we naturally love our parents more, Yi Zhi admits, but we can redirect that love to everyone equally.

There is one major weakness of this first interpretation, though. Yi Zhi is presumably trying to justify his lavish funeral for his parents. If he was in charge of his parents' funeral, he must have been an adult. But if he was already an adult, why was he still bestowing greater affection on his parents? Why hadn't he already reached the stage of impartial caring?

Interpretation (2) does not have this disadvantage. According to this reading of Yi Zhi's Maxim, it is true throughout one's adulthood that, while committed to impartial caring, one may bestow greater affection on one's parents. (This might be true because people find it easier to care for their own kin more than strangers both as a matter of psychological ease and as a practical matter. I should take care of *my* parents because somebody has to, and I am better situated to know what they need and more easily motivated to provide it than are strangers.) Presumably, if this is Yi Zhi's view, he would acknowledge that one must, in some circumstances, act against one's inclinations to favor family members and instead act for the impartial good of all. (This would be what distinguishes him from Ruists like Mengzi.)

The weakness of this second interpretation is that it requires much more extrapolation and creative reading of what Yi Zhi literally says. (Or so it seems to me. But, as we all know, one person's "textual extrapolation" is another person's "obvious literal sense.")

In any case, Xuzi, the intermediary, carries Yi Zhi's reply back to Mengzi, who says,

"Now, does Yizi truly hold that one's affection (qīn 親) for one's elder brother's son is like one's affection for one's neighbor's baby?<sup>140</sup> There is

<sup>140</sup> Possibly, "...one's affection for one's elder brother's son can *become like* (為若) one's affection for one's neighbor's baby."

only [one thing that should be] gleaned from that [saying]. When a crawling baby is about to fall into a well, it is not the baby's fault. Furthermore, the reason [why Yizi is mistaken is that] Heaven, in producing the things [in the world] causes them to have one source (běn 本), but Yizi [gives them] two sources.

The answer to Mengzi's rhetorical question, "Now, does Yizi truly hold that one's affection for one's elder brother's son is like one's affection for one's neighbor's baby?" is either "No, Yi Zhi does not think that" or "Yes, Yi Zhi does think that, but he is a fool for doing so." But what argumentative force does either reply have? Since Mengzi does not presuppose a sharp distinction between fact and value, he presumably wants to draw attention to two facts that he sees as closely related: (1) people almost invariably *do* care more for relatives than for strangers, and (2) most people share the ethical intuition that we *ought* to have such differential ethical concern. (Using contemporary philosophical vocabulary, most people recognize an agent-relative obligation toward their *own* relatives that they do not believe they have toward strangers.)

These points are relevant to Mengzi's alternative interpretation of the phrase from the *Documents*, which he illustrates with the example of a child about to fall into a well. As Mengzi famously observed in 2A6, anyone would feel alarm and compassion for *any* child in this situation. Part of the reason why we would always have this reaction, Mengzi suggests here, is that the child is innocent ("it is not the baby's fault"). *This*, Mengzi is arguing, is the relevant similarity between the baby and the subjects of the sage kings ("the ancients") that led them to care for the people "like caring for a baby." Without proper guidance, the people will perform actions that lead them into trouble. However, the people cannot be blamed for this, so to punish them in such a situation is to "trap them" (as Mengzi says in 1A7.20). Indeed, the importance of avoiding punishing those who are "without fault" or "guiltless" (wú zuì 無罪) is a common theme in the *Mengzi* (e.g., 1A7, 4B4, 7A33).

The fact that the sage kings treated their subjects like endangered babies *in this respect* does not entail that they treated everyone in all circumstances as if they were their own relatives. In fact, Mengzi suggests that Sage King Shun was forgiving of his brother to an extreme degree precisely because he was *his* brother (5A2–3), and also protective of his father in ways that he would not be protective of strangers (7A35, discussed in Chapter 3, §V.C). So the facts that Mengzi appealed to at the beginning of his response to Yi Zhi still hold: most people do care

for their elder brother's son (for example) more than for the children of neighbors *in most circumstances*, and most people feel that doing so is ethically appropriate.

How does Mengzi's distinction between "one source" (literally, "one root") and "two sources" relate to all this? How we understand this distinction depends on which reading we give Yi Zhi's Maxim. Nivison's interpretation proposes that the "one source" of the Way is the set of innate ethical dispositions and inclinations of one's heart, which lead one to have greater concern for one's relatives. The "two sources" are the former source plus Mohism as an ethical doctrine, which directs one to extend one's innate concern for one's relatives until it reaches everyone equally. In short, the two sources are one's "heart" (xīn 心) and one's ethical "maxims" (yán 言). Mengzi is saying that Heaven gives us the former source, which makes it ethically authoritative. Ethical maxims are authoritative only insofar as they are expressions of an ethically cultivated heart. But Mohists like Yi Zhi try to set up "impartial caring" as a maxim with independent authority. Mengzi's distinction between one and two sources raises the issue of why impartial caring should have any ethical authority over us if it is not grounded in the natural reactions of our hearts.

As we saw, the Mohists accept the ethical authority of Heaven, and they argue that Heaven is committed to impartiality. Furthermore, in the synoptic chapters, the Mohists argue that human motivations are highly malleable. Consequently, there is no tension between the early Mohist view of the heart and their commitment to the ethical authority of Heaven as the source of impartial caring. However, the cost of this position is an implausible view about human developmental psychology. Mohists like Yi Zhi adopted a much more plausible view of human psychology, according to which greater love for one's parents is a natural developmental stage. However, the cost of *this* is that it compromises the Mohist commitment to the ethical authority of Heaven. The Mohists claim that Heaven favors impartial caring, but the only explanation available for how we get the innate dispositions of our heart is that they were implanted in us by Heaven. But why would Heaven implant dispositions in us unless those dispositions were genuinely ethical? In short, early Mohism is consistent but psychologically implausible. The Mohism of Yi Zhi is psychologically plausible but inconsistent.

The second interpretation of Yi Zhi's Maxim that we considered above would identify the same two sources (one's heart and one's maxims)

but interpret their relationship slightly differently. On the second interpretation one's heart is naturally disposed to have greater concern for one's relatives than for strangers. Because of this (and because of the difficulty of altering these dispositions), one allows people to maintain these differential dispositions and act in accordance with them in most circumstances. However, the justification for doing so is that it promotes benefits, impartially evaluated. And because this is the justification, there may be circumstances in which one must act against one's normal dispositions. For example, the sage kings would care for their subjects as if they were their children, perhaps in some circumstances neglecting the welfare of their own relatives to do so.

Mengzi's objection would then be much like one that Michael Stocker has raised to contemporary consequentialism: that it produces a sort of "moral schizophrenia" – "a split between one's motives [heart] and one's reasons [maxims]." <sup>141</sup> This is slightly different from the first interpretation of Yi Zhi's Maxim. On the first reading of Yi Zhi's Maxim, one's innate motivations can themselves provide justifications. However, these justifications are somehow trumped by the maxim of impartial caring. (The problem of how that trumping is supposed to be justified, in a framework in which both one's innate motivations and impartial caring are dictated by Heaven, is then the crux of Mengzi's objection.) On the second reading of Yi Zhi's Maxim, one's innate motivations are not directly connected to the justifications for one's actions at all. The only justification for one's actions is impartial caring. Here the problem is that it is not clear how Yi Zhi can deny that one's innate motivations provide some justification for one's actions, given that they are implanted in us by Heaven.

Mengzi closes with a story that can be regarded as a thought experiment or as an actual historical claim:

"Now, in past ages, there were those who did not bury their parents. When their parents died, they took them and abandoned them in a ditch. The next day they passed by them, and foxes were eating them, bugs were sucking on them. Sweat broke out on the [survivors'] foreheads. They turned away and did not look. Now, it was not for the sake of others that they sweated. What was inside their hearts broke through to their countenances. So they went home and, returning with baskets and shovels, covered them. If covering them was really right, then when filial children and benevolent people cover their parents, it must also be part of the Way."

<sup>141</sup> Stocker, "Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories," p. 531.

Xuzi told Yizi this. Yizi looked thoughtful for a moment and said, “He has taught me.”

The details of Mengzi’s argument are problematic. As the Mohists in China and Herodotus in Greece observed, funeral practices vary from culture to culture. Burial is not a universal response to concern for the bodies of the dead.<sup>142</sup> And was there really a point at which humans did not provide funerals of *some form* for the bodies of the dead?<sup>143</sup> However, Mengzi’s story, interpreted as a thought experiment, gives a plausible account of at least part of the origin of funeral practices of some kind: the need to dispose of the bodies of the deceased in a manner consistent with one’s love for them while they were alive.

However, it is not clear initially how this is a challenge to anything that Yi Zhi has said. Mohists do *not* argue that we should abandon the bodies of the deceased for foxes and bugs to feast on. They merely object to performing funerals with the elaborate rituals, costly ritual objects, and long mourning period that Ruists advocate (Chapter 3, §IV.D.1). Mengzi’s thought experiment suggests that mourning rituals are grounded in innate human reactions, so it might present something of a challenge to early Mohism, which was loath to admit that there are any such reactions. However, on either of the interpretations under consideration, Yi Zhi is a Mohist “revisionist” who acknowledges that humans have innate concern for their own kin. So Yi Zhi can absorb every detail of Mengzi’s thought experiment into his own vision of the Way.

Or can he? Mengzi is suggesting that burial practices originated from innate reactions. (“Now, it was not for the sake of others that they sweated.

<sup>142</sup> See Chapter 3, §IV.A. Philip Ivanhoe directed me (in conversation) to Jessica Mitford’s *The American Way of Death Revisited*, which discusses the historical contingency and institutional causes of many contemporary funeral practices in the United States. Embalming, for example, is an expensive process that serves no useful purpose in most cases. It became common as a means of preserving the bodies of war-dead during the Civil War, so that they could be sent home from the front for burial. The practice has been continued largely because of the ignorance of the general public and the economic interests of the funeral industry.

<sup>143</sup> There is evidence that a collection of remains at Sima de los Huestos in Atapuerca, Spain, may be the oldest intentional burial discovered yet. This site dates from no later than 300,000 B.C.E. and contains the remains of *homo heidelbergensis* skeletons. So it seems likely that funerals have been performed since before there were even humans (*homo sapiens*), *per se*. (I am indebted to Anne Pike-Tay of Vassar’s anthropology department for discussing this with me.) Mengzi did not know about the evolutionary development of humans, of course, but even on his view of history it is not obvious *when* the sort of incident he describes would have occurred. Prior to Sage King Yao?

What was inside their hearts broke through to their countenances.”) These reactions motivate the behavior, but also justify it (“covering them was really right”). This is a case in which there is “one source.” It is *possible* for Yi Zhi to assert that there is a second source. But the picture Mengzi presents has great intuitive appeal and makes no reference to a second source of the Way. Acceptance of Mengzi’s account entails acceptance of our inclinations to give our parents more than the sort of bare-bones funeral (no pun intended) the Mohists advocate: “then when filial children and benevolent people cover their parents, it must also be part of the Way.”

So the role of Mengzi’s thought experiment is to make vivid the implications of the conception of the human heart that Mengzi and Yi Zhi share. Once this is clear, the tension between Yi Zhi’s commitment to following our innate motivations and allowing Mohist doctrine to redirect these motivations becomes painfully apparent.

In this section, we have considered only a few of Mengzi’s more intriguing arguments. We have by no means discussed every argument that Mengzi gives. (To do so would require a book unto itself.) But I hope it is clear that Mengzi does provide philosophical arguments and that these are often quite challenging. Interpreting and evaluating his arguments requires much thought, and I have no doubt others will wish to dispute my interpretations (just as I have disputed previous interpretations on many points). However, anyone familiar with the study of the history of *Western* philosophy will recognize that understanding Mengzi requires no more diligence or imaginative reconstruction than does understanding Plato, Descartes, or Hegel.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Mengzi differs in content and methodology from the received text of the *Analects* in many ways. If *Analects* 4.15 gives the “one thread” of Kongzi’s teachings, then Mengzi chose to ignore it. We see no evidence that “dutyfulness” and “reciprocity” are the two strands of Mengzi’s Way. There is only slightly more interest in the issues suggested by *Analects* 13.3. As we saw, Mengzi shows in passing some interest in what might be described as “correcting names,” when he refuses to call a tyrant a “king.” But even when he seems most interested in language (as in 6A3), the interest takes a form very different from anything we find in the *Analects*. Ritual is certainly an important part of life for Mengzi; ritual propriety



is one of his cardinal virtues. But the *Analects* records a whole “book” of observations on proper ritual performance, whereas Mengzi’s comments on ritual are rarer and often stress the violability of ritual. (Contrast *Analects* Book 3 with *Mengzi* 4A17 or 6B1.) In place of the *Analects*’ unsystematic collection of virtues, Mengzi gives a clear list of four cardinal virtues. Of these, one (*ren*) is consistently used in a narrower sense than it often is in the *Analects*, and two others (*yi* and *li*) have their emphasis moved from behavior to character.<sup>144</sup> I see no hint in the *Analects* of Mengzi’s view that human nature has incipient tendencies toward virtue. For Mengzi, human nature is like sprouts that just need to be cultivated; for Kongzi as portrayed in the *Analects* human nature is like raw jade that must be laboriously ground, carved, and polished. Consequently, in self-cultivation, Mengzi emphasizes “concentration” and developing the resources already present in one’s mind, whereas the *Analects* emphasizes “learning” from classic texts and ritual practice. Nonetheless, Mengzi clearly also sees a role for learning. He frequently cites the *Odes* for illustrations of living well, and he uses the *Documents* as a teaching text.

In general, if Mengzi read a book like the *Analects* as we have it, he chose to ignore much of it. Add to this the fact that Mengzi frequently attributes to Kongzi quotations not found in the received *Analects*, and one strongly suspects that there were substantially different versions of the sayings of Kongzi in circulation in the fourth century B.C.E.

But Mengzi shares several views with the *Analects* and almost all Ruists for the next two millennia. He believes in the importance, from an ethical perspective, of familial relationships. He is committed to the existence of agent-relative obligations (greater love and obligations toward one’s own family members) and agent-relative prohibitions (unwillingness to do what is unrighteous, even if the consequences would be beneficial). He thinks that living well involves “this-worldly” goods such as sharing in the life of one’s family and friends, aesthetic appreciation, learning, and helping others through service to the community. At a general political level, he thinks that the problems of society can best be addressed by cultivating virtue in individuals and then giving political authority to the genuinely virtuous, who will provide for the basic needs of the people and rule by ethical inspiration rather than coercion and warfare.

<sup>144</sup> In fairness, though, Mengzi’s use of *ren* does have some precedent in the *Analects*, and his use of *yi* and *li* is systematically related to the use of those terms in the *Analects*.

Given the subtlety, originality, breadth, and systematicity of his views, any historian of philosophy ought to find Mengzi interesting. But is he of any contemporary philosophical relevance? Can we learn from him in the way that contemporary Western philosophers learn from Aristotle, Hume, and Kant? To this issue I turn in the next chapter.

## Pluralistic Ruism

One who keeps warm the old, yet appreciates the new, is fit to be a teacher.

– Kongzi

... a person trying to understand a text is prepared for it to tell him something.

– Gadamer

### I. THE ROAD TRAVELED

In this book, I have discussed Kongzi (Confucius), the early Mohists, and Mengzi (Mencius) using a particular methodology: one that understands Ruism (Confucianism) as a form of “virtue ethics,” interprets Mohism as a form of consequentialism, and emphasizes the careful analysis and evaluation of arguments. In Chapter 1, I noted that my approach is an “analytic” philosophical version of a hermeneutic of restoration. However, in the spirit of methodological pluralism, I do not rule out other approaches, be they postmodern, literary, social-scientific, or versions of a hermeneutic of suspicion. Of course, while granting someone the right to use their own methodology, we may criticize how successfully they have applied it.

I have critically incorporated the commentary of the School of the Way (“Neo-Confucianism”). Thinkers like Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming are worth reading because they are interesting philosophers in their own rights and are careful and insightful readers of the classics. In addition, their interpretations often color contemporary understandings of Ruism so deeply (and so invisibly) that those who ignore the commentarial tradition are doomed to repeat it. However, I agree with those (including Dai Zhen in the Chinese tradition) who argue that the School of the

Way fundamentally distorts ancient Ruism by projecting onto it concepts drawn from the metaphysics of later Buddhism. To put it metaphorically, Neo-Confucianism is Confucianism seen through Buddhist lenses. (Or, in my preferred vocabulary, “the School of the Way sees Ruism through Buddhist lenses.”)

I am writing in English and using a Western philosophical vocabulary, but I have tried to do justice to the complex similarities and differences between Western and Chinese thought. One technique to achieve this goal is to use a thin characterization of virtue ethics as giving accounts of (1) human flourishing, (2) the virtues that support leading a flourishing life, (3) ethical cultivation, or how one acquires the virtues, and (4) philosophical anthropology, or a view of human nature. The different forms of virtue ethics are similar in discussing these four issues, but they differ substantially over the thick accounts they offer. Ruism, in common with many Western forms of virtue ethics, is comparatively particularistic (as opposed to generalist) and emphasizes cultivating ethical connoisseurs.

We can distinguish discovery, development, and re-formation models of ethical cultivation. Mengzi’s frequent use of sprout metaphors indicates that he has what is primarily a development model; however, he thinks that it is also important for humans to discover that they have these active, incipient tendencies toward virtue within themselves. Xunzi emphasizes a re-formation model: making a person virtuous is like dying cloth or grinding metal. Nonetheless, he does suggest that humans innately have some very inchoate feelings of concern for others, which can be harnessed to develop ethically. Wang Yangming has an almost pure discovery model: we have a fully-formed virtuous nature, which is only hidden by selfish desires. Becoming virtuous is a matter of simply exercising this virtuous nature. Zhu Xi has an underlying discovery model as well, but he presents a more nuanced view than Wang (I would say) by combining elements of a re-formation model (in the Lesser Learning that the very young should undergo) as well as a development model (because the Greater Learning begins from what one already has discovered of one’s true nature, and then “extends” that to other things).

In Chapter 2, I discussed Kongzi and some general features of Ruism. One can divide almost all contemporary interpreters of the *Analects* according to whether they emphasize passage 4.15 (“devotion” and “reciprocity”) or 13.3 (“correcting names”) as the key to interpreting the rest of the text. I have argued that both of these passages are late interpolations. Their contemporary weight among interpreters is due to the influence of contingent historical factors. *Analects* 4.15 came to prominence

because of the desires of Zhu Xi to find systematicity in the text and to validate the influence of Kongzi's disciple Zengzi. Similarly, Hu Shih and Fung Yu-lan hoped to find parallels in ancient Chinese thought for twentieth-century Anglo-American philosophy, which led to their emphasis on 13.3. However, neither passage is representative of the text as a whole. Interpreters can defend the centrality of these passages only by engaging in "cherry picking": focusing on the passages that are the easiest for their interpretation to handle and then ignoring or slighting the importance of other parts of the text that would be more problematic for their reading.

My reading of the *Analects* emphasizes Kongzi's particularism. This is illustrated by 11.22, where Kongzi gives opposite answers to two disciples who ask the same question. More importantly, it is evident throughout the *Analects*, where Kongzi presents different answers to the same questions, varying with the particular interlocutors and particular contexts. Although the *Analects* is a more "evocative" than "systematic" text, we do see in it the themes that are central to Ruism over the next two millennia. In addition, the unresolved tensions in the *Analects* help explain the debates among later Ruists over the precise form that the Way takes.

The role of *ritual* or the *rites* in Ruism is distinctive enough to require extensive discussion of its own. As I use it, ritual is learned human activity that is regarded as sacred. I emphasize a broadly functionalist approach to ritual, of the kind that was first developed by the ancient Ruist Xunzi, and then later rediscovered in the West by Emile Durkheim and A. R. Radcliffe-Brown (among others). According to a functionalist approach, ritual expresses and reinforces certain attitudes and conceptions of the world. In particular, ritual is often associated with expressing and reinforcing our connection with, dependence on, and obligations to others.

Ruists also emphasize aesthetic appreciation, intellectual activities aimed at making oneself a better person, caring for and helping other people, agent-relative obligations to those bound to one by ties such as kinship, taking part in family life, joy in the face of physical deprivation (because of the knowledge that one is living well), but also sadness at genuine loss (such as upon the death of loved ones).

The *Analects* discusses many virtues, including humaneness, righteousness, wisdom, loyalty, trustworthiness, courage, and filial piety. Kongzi does not seem to have a list of the cardinal virtues. However, if I were forced to give an opinion, I would say that Kongzi's most central virtues are humaneness and wisdom. Humaneness, in this pairing, would be

having proper motivation, especially a concern for the well-being of others; wisdom would involve abilities such as means-end deliberation and judging the character of others. Humaneness and wisdom are paired in a number of passages, and having them would give one both the right motives and the skills to act on those motives.

Kongzi seems not to have had an explicit view of human nature. However, the sort of metaphors he uses for ethical cultivation (e.g., carving jade), as well as his sense that human ethical development is a laborious and seldom successful project, suggest that he thought human nature was very resistant to virtue and hence would favor a re-formation model of cultivation. So Kongzi's implicit view of human nature is closer to Xunzi's view of human nature than it is to Mengzi's.

The *Analects* shows a tension between "thinking" and "learning" that would dog later Ruist views of ethical cultivation. Some Ruists, such as Mengzi and Wang Yangming, have tended to emphasize thinking, whereas other Ruists, such as Xunzi and Zhu Xi, have tended to emphasize learning. Kongzi himself, at least as portrayed in the received text of the *Analects*, seems to have emphasized "learning." This is consistent with his assuming a re-formation model of ethical cultivation.

For a Western audience, Kongzi's emphasis on learning and tradition raises the issue of whether he has any interest in either truth or argumentation (as opposed to mere assertion). Here, it is important to see an overlap (not identity) between the basic orientations of ancient Chinese and Greek philosophy. Whether we are considering the Pythagoreans, Socrates, and Plato, on one side of the world, or Kongzi, the Mohists, and Mengzi, on the other, we find thinkers who are concerned to rescue their societies from what they see as crises and who see this as connected with the truth or falsity of certain claims. The difference seems to be a matter of emphasis: Plato wants to help people learn the truth because he thinks this will show them how to live well; Kongzi wants to show his disciples how to live well, but he thinks they have to know many truths in order to do this.

There is certainly a paucity of explicit argumentation in the *Analects*. However, this is not characteristic of Ruism as a whole. Later thinkers like Mengzi and Xunzi argue explicitly and well. In addition, as Joel J. Kupperman observes, the argument in favor of a philosophy may simply be that it, as a whole, gives us the best available "orientation that is fruitful in making sense of the world."<sup>1</sup> Kongzi lived in a society suffering from a

<sup>1</sup> Kupperman, *Learning from Asian Philosophy*, p. 11.

social and ethical crisis. He offered a plausible candidate for a Way that would get society out of that crisis. Thus, in a sense, the whole text of the *Analects* is its own argument.

In Chapter 3, I explained that one of the “core beliefs” of Mohism is that it is crucial to find a “clear standard” (*míng fǎ* 明法) for judging actions, institutions, and people. This contrasts with the ideal of the “ethical connoisseur” of Ruism, which the Mohists saw as elitist obscurantism. In addition, the Mohists wanted a standard that was “impartial” (*jiān* 兼), or agent-neutral. They found this standard in maximizing benefit over harm. So, in Western terms, the Mohists were impartial consequentialists.

But the Mohists evaluated claims by appealing to two other standards (literally, “gnomons”) in addition to the standard of producing good consequences: precedent and evidence. There has been discussion over whether these standards are indicators of truth. I believe that the Mohists *were* concerned with the truth of doctrines (i.e., with the questions of whether ghosts and spirits really exist and of whether there really is fate). However, I am not suggesting that they were concerned with truth *as opposed to* the benefits of following a doctrine. They held that the true doctrines were also the doctrines that would have the best consequences if we followed them. In assuming this, they were not making a definitional claim (that “being true” is identical with having the best consequences) but were identifying an indicator of truth. Their belief that good consequences are an indicator of truth was based on their confidence in the beneficent orderliness of the world.

The Mohists offer an ingenious and detailed defense of agent-neutrality in their essay “Impartial Caring.” For example, in the Caretaker Argument, the Mohists present a thought experiment in which we have to entrust the well-being of our family to another person, and ask us whether we would choose a “partial” or an “impartial” caretaker. They argue that anyone would choose an impartial caretaker. Part of what is problematic about this argument is the uncertainty about what position the “partial” person holds. The argument seems either to be a straw-man argument (if the partialist is supposed to be a Ruist) or to offer a false dichotomy (if the argument ignores the Ruist position as an alternative).

The Practicability Argument gives examples of changes in human behavior that are at least as drastic as the change to impartial caring would be. In each case, the change is accomplished by a ruler who rewards the desired behavior and punishes other kinds of behavior. This line of

argument suggests that the Mohists conceive of humans as having only a minimal innate structure to their motivations and dispositions. This minimal structure is, furthermore, highly malleable.

Several aspects of the Mohist position are challenging and revolutionary, including their use of a state-of-nature argument to justify governmental authority. However, all forms of impartial consequentialism, whether Chinese (like Mohism) or Western (like utilitarianism), try to take what Thomas Nagel has labeled the “view from nowhere” – a perfectly disinterested perspective on value. But such a perspective is neither possible nor desirable.

In Chapter 4, I turn to Mengzi, who saw the teachings of Yang Zhu and Mozi as the primary philosophical challenges to Ruism. In response to Yang Zhu’s claim that human nature is self-interested, Mengzi uses tools such as the child-at-the-well thought experiment to argue that humans have innate but incipient dispositions toward virtuous inclinations, such as compassion for the suffering of others and disdain to accept demeaning treatment. He refers to these incipient dispositions (using an agricultural metaphor) as “sprouts.” There may be humans who show no signs of the sprouts (what we would call sociopaths or psychopaths), but Mengzi argues that their natures have been destroyed by bad environmental influences. (He illustrates this with his story of Ox Mountain.)

Mengzi’s conception of human nature also offers a response to the Mohists: their impartial consequentialism is impractical since it runs contrary to motivations that are central to human nature. This is an especially strong argument against the position found in the Mohist essay “Impartial Caring” that human motivations are almost infinitely malleable. However, Mengzi confronts a revisionist Mohist, Yi Zhi, who sees the Way as having “two sources”: (1) our heart, which is disposed toward agent-relative obligations, and (2) the Mohist doctrine of agent-neutral impartial caring. Yi Zhi seemingly argues for a form of indirect consequentialism: because of the limitations imposed by human nature, we normally allow people to have and act on agent-relative inclinations, but these are ultimately justified by (and will sometimes require modification in terms of) their impartial benefits. But Mengzi points out the fatal tension in a position like this. The Mohists acknowledge that Heaven is ethically good, and if Heaven has implanted in our heart certain inclinations, these must be the “one source” for the Way. But then on what basis can someone like Yi Zhi justify accepting *any* doctrine that asks us to fundamentally modify these inclinations?



Mengzi has a complex and nuanced philosophy of ethical cultivation, which has “inner-directed” and “outer-directed” aspects. One of Mengzi’s key notions in inner-directed cultivation is *sī* 思, “concentration.” Concentration involves focusing one’s attention on the sprouts so that one is aware of them and has a positive attitude toward them. This helps stimulate their growth. In outer-directed self-cultivation, Mengzi stresses “extension.” Extension is based on the notion that, because of the “sprouts,” we have virtuous reactions to certain paradigmatic situations but do not yet have these reactions in all appropriate situations. Cognitive extension is coming to see the ethically relevant similarity between a situation in which we do, and a situation in which we should but do not, have a virtuous reaction. Affective extension is coming to have the same emotions and motivations in the relevantly similar case that we do in the paradigmatic case. The difficult question is how cognitive and affective extension are related.

*Mengzi* 3A5, with its insistence on a “one source” Way and rejection of any “two source” view, seems to greatly limit the extent to which cognitive extension can shape or guide affective extension. I examined a specific case (5A2) of Mengzi giving guidance to a disciple who was ethically confused, and I tried to show that Mengzi was helping the disciple to achieve cognitive extension. I argued that this example illustrates that cognitive extension is not a process of generalizing to a rule that one can apply unproblematically to new cases. Rather, cognitive extension is like getting better at a skill.

This example also helps us see that Mengzi believes in the possibility of some sort of conceptual discussion or reflection guiding one’s feelings. At least in some cases, emotions may be warranted by particular beliefs. So my feeling sad for a suffering animal is warranted by my belief that it is, in fact, feeling pain as a result of neglect. But suppose I sincerely came to believe that the animal was *not* in pain as a result of neglect. (“Don’t worry. That dog is *not* starving. It’s a greyhound. They’re supposed to be that thin.”) We would expect my sadness to disappear. By parallel reasoning, if I feel sad for *this* suffering animal, I should feel sorry for *that* suffering animal (assuming that their situations are relevantly similar). If my sadness for *this* suffering animal is genuinely connected with my beliefs about it, then coming to have the same belief about *that* suffering animal should enable my feelings to *flow* from this case to that. Of course, there is no guarantee that this flow will occur. If we fail to press on with active self-cultivation, affective extension may not occur, and cognitive extension may even be lost. (Mengzi saw this happen in the case of the

rulers whom he tried to help.) And the effort to force the extension to occur is counterproductive. (This is part of the point of Mengzi's story of the "farmer from Song.")

Mengzi identifies four cardinal virtues: benevolence, righteousness, wisdom, and propriety. In common with other Ruists, Mengzi sees benevolence as involving agent-relative obligations. We should have the most compassion (and have the greatest obligations) to members of our own family and less to strangers. Righteousness is disdain regarding ethical character flaws that would warrant others to regard one as contemptible. Intuitively, the *feeling* of ethical disdain is similar to the disgust one feels toward certain kinds of nonethical contamination, such as one's disgust at dampness, drunkenness, getting one's fine clothing soiled, and disgusting odors. Ethical disdain grounds agent-relative prohibitions against certain actions.

Propriety is closely related to righteousness. But an action is best described as a manifestation of propriety when it is intimately connected to the conventions and rituals of one's society. By means of these rituals, one expresses and maintains hierarchical social roles. This, in turn, helps humans restrain their tendency toward self-aggrandizement. Thus understood, we can see how propriety helps support and preserve benevolence and righteousness.

Wisdom has several parts, many of which are illustrated by Mengzi's discussion of Boli Xi in 5A9: (1) the disposition to properly evaluate the characters of others; (2) skill at means-end deliberation: the ability to deliberate well about the best means to achieve given ends and to determine the likely consequences of various courses of action; (3) an understanding of, and disposition to avoid, what is base (i.e., an appreciation of and commitment to virtuous behavior); and (4) a healthy concern for one's own well-being.

The debates between the Mengzians and the Gaozians at the beginning of *Mengzi* 6A1–5 are among the most intriguing arguments in the text. The key to understanding the debate over human nature in 6A1–3 is to see that the metaphors are not rhetorical window dressing. Gaozi and Mengzi both assume an underlying ontological correspondence between the natures of things. Mengzi shows how, in each case, Gaozi's metaphors fail to do justice to this correspondence. The key to the debate in 6A4–5, over whether righteousness is "internal" or "external," is the explanation by one of Mengzi's disciples of why he regards righteousness as internal: "I act out of my respect, hence I say that it is internal." This suggests that for a virtue to be internal is for it to require acting out of some particular

emotion, and not just acting out of a commitment to following the rituals or obligations.

So far my discussion of Chinese philosophy has been almost exclusively historical and exegetical. However, the exegetical study of the history of *Western* philosophy is frequently used to inform contemporary philosophical discussions. (There are contemporary Aristotelians, like Martha Nussbaum, and contemporary Kantians, like Christine Korsgaard, to name just two examples.) Obviously, it would be nothing more than necrophilia to reproduce without alteration some historical position. Historical change illuminates limitations of previous philosophies. (I am an admirer of Hegel myself, but I must acknowledge that history did not end with the Prussian state of his era; nor, pace Francis Fukuyama, has it ended yet.) And contrary to what sometimes passes for indubitable truth, philosophy *does* make some progress just through discussion and argumentation. (In some ways, we now understand Hume's view of the role of reason and emotion in ethics better than he or his contemporaries could have, because we have become clearer than they could have been about the distinctions between emotivism, psychologism, prescriptivism, error theories, ideal observer theories, and other positions.)

Generally speaking, if we wish to engage in the "historical retrieval" of earlier philosophical views, our goal should be to produce a position that is, in Lee Yearley's formulation, "credible" and "appropriate."<sup>2</sup> Our interpretation should be "credible" in the sense that it is *plausible* for us today. A credible appropriation of an earlier philosophical view is one that is a "live option" for contemporary thinkers, given our knowledge of cultural diversity, historical change, modern science, and at least some of the values and institutional forms that have been emphasized as a result of the Western Enlightenment. But at the same time historical retrieval should result in a position that is "appropriate" in the sense that it is *faithful* to the philosophy that inspires it. It must be recognizable as being, at some fundamental level, a version of the original philosophy. A third criterion, not explicitly mentioned by Yearley but (I think) implicit in what he says, is that the resulting position be "inspiring." By this grandiose term I mean simply that it should be clear why the reconstructed position offers something distinctive and valuable to ongoing philosophical debates.

<sup>2</sup>Yearley, "Confucianism and Genre," p. 140.

Ruism has already been the subject of several efforts at historical retrieval. Perhaps the two most noteworthy have been the postmodern approach, championed by Roger Ames and the late David Hall, and the approach of the so-called “New Confucians” (whom I discussed briefly in Chapter 1, §I.B.3). My own view is that the New Confucians and the postmodernists are each right about certain things. The New Confucians are right that Ruism can and should change in certain respects in order to be a plausible contemporary position. In particular, Ruism must be consistent with some version of democracy and with modern science. (As the New Confucians would agree, this does not mean that Ruists should accept whatever form of democracy, or whatever uses of modern science, happen to be current. Ruism can be used to constructively inform and critique democracy and even the ethics of scientific research and application.) And the postmodernists are right that any faithful interpretation of Ruism will not attribute to it any sort of Cartesianism. Ruists are not metaphysical dualists, nor are they epistemological foundationalists.

I worry, however, that both of these approaches fail to produce accounts of Ruism that are sufficiently faithful or inspiring. As I have argued, New Confucianism sees Ruism through the lens of Buddhist-influenced “Neo-Confucianism.” It is also unclear how much the New Confucian formulation of Ruism has to say that Western philosophers should find new and inspiring. One seminal New Confucian text tells us that the West can learn at least five lessons from the Confucian tradition: to accept the present with contentment, the “wisdom of being round and spiritual,” “mildness and commiseration or compassion,” “to store up man’s life energy, so that it will not be drained up or strained excessively,” and “the feeling of ‘one world one family.’”<sup>3</sup> These are indeed lessons that the modern West needs to learn, but there are antecedents for each of them within the West’s own traditions.

I find postmodernism a similarly distorting framework. It is certainly true that Ruism is not “modernist,” but this does not entail that it is “postmodernist.” Readings of the original texts that make it seem that Ruists advocate creativity unconstrained by human nature, Heaven, and tradition seem very forced to me. Furthermore, precisely because the postmodern interpretation of Ruism renders it so similar to Rortian pragmatism, it offers nothing inspiringly new to contemporary debates. Finally, if our choices are between modernism, postmodernism,

<sup>3</sup> Chang et al., “Manifesto on the Reappraisal of Chinese Culture,” pp. 548–58.

and a hermeneutic approach, I find the third the most promising and productive.<sup>4</sup>

But, as Mozi says, “those who condemn another’s view must offer something in its place. If one condemns another’s view without offering something in its place this is like adding water to a flood or flame to a fire. Such appeals prove to have no merit.”<sup>5</sup>

## II. THE ROAD LEFT BEHIND

I would like to begin by discussing some of the limitations and blindneses of Ruism as an ethical system. These weaknesses must be overcome if Ruism is to be a plausible philosophical alternative for us today.

Ruism is ethically limited by having a monistic conception of value, sexist assumptions about gender roles, a very strong form of “epistemological optimism” (which can lead to intolerance), and a hegemonic conception of the role of virtue in government. In place of these limitations, Ruism can and must learn to place greater emphasis on pluralism, feminism, epistemological humility (or fallibilism), and procedural justice.

### II.A. Monism versus Pluralism

The claim that Ruism is monistic is easily misunderstood. Monism is not the same as generalism. Recall that generalism is a position on a spectrum with particularism at the other extreme. Ruists are closer to the particularist end of the spectrum than are generalists like, say, Kant. In describing Ruists as ethical monists I also do not mean to deny that they recognize some variety in ethically valuable lives. The lives of the nobles who teach and serve in government, the farmers who plough the

<sup>4</sup>By “hermeneutics” here I mean not just the position of H-G. Gadamer (“Hermeneutics” with a capital “H”), but rather the broad range of positions that agree with postmodernism in rejecting Cartesian foundationalism but seek to retain the ideal of philosophical progress through dialogue and constructive argumentation. (I would put in this camp thinkers as diverse as Alasdair MacIntyre, Martha Nussbaum, Charles Taylor, Hilary Putnam [at least in *Reason, Truth and History*], Jurgen Habermas, and of course Gadamer himself.) Obviously, both the New Confucian and postmodern readings of Ruism deserve a much more thoughtful appreciation and critique than I have given here. I wish only to sketch why I have chosen to move in a different direction. (For more on the postmodern approach, see Neville, *Boston Confucianism*, pp. 47–50, 147–54; Van Norden, Review of *Boston Confucianism* by Robert Neville; Wilson, “Conformity, Individuality and the Nature of Virtue”; and Loudon, “What Does Heaven Say?”)

<sup>5</sup>Mozi 16, “Impartial Caring,” *Readings*, p. 68.

fields that produce food for everyone, the craftsmen who produce tools and ritual vessels, the merchants who facilitate the trade of goods, and the wives of all of them (who raise the children, weave silk and manage household affairs) all have value and are necessary for the functioning of society. However, Ruists are monists in the sense that the valuable roles are very limited and are hierarchically organized, from most to least exalted: nobles, farmers, craftsmen, and merchants (shì nǒng gōng shāng 士農工商). Nobles are “great people” whereas the others are “petty people.” (The status of women depends on the status of their families and their role in that family, but it is almost always subordinate to that of their male relatives.) The hierarchy is, in principle, fluid and meritocratic. Sage King Shun began as a farmer. The operative word here, though, is *began*. Because of his Virtue, he could not help but rise to become an official and then king.

Instead of being ethically monistic, Ruism should become pluralistic. But pluralism, like monism, is a term that is easily misconstrued. In particular, pluralism is importantly different from skepticism and relativism.<sup>6</sup> The ethical skeptic would say that we do not *know* what really has value. “Perhaps being a serial killer is good, or perhaps being an emergency room nurse is good. Who’s to say?” shrugs the skeptic. The relativist, in contrast with both the skeptic and the pluralist, says that value depends on the point of view of the evaluator. For the ethical relativist, ethical terms like “good” function implicitly like “left”:

“The dean is the guy standing on the left.”

“Isn’t that the provost?”

“Well, I meant that the guy on the college *president’s* left is the dean. The guy on *our* left is the provost.”

Just as “left” is a predicate that makes reference to spatial perspective, so (according to ethical relativists) do predicates like “good,” “bad,” “right,” and “wrong” make reference (at least implicitly) to the evaluations of a culture (cultural relativism) or an individual (subjectivism).

Ethical relativists have different views about what the relevant perspective is for judging value. Cultural relativists say that ethical value depends on the perspective of some particular cultural group. So, for example, slavery is wrong when judged from the perspective of contemporary mainstream U.S. culture, but right when judged from the perspective

<sup>6</sup> Isaiah Berlin, perhaps the leading theorist of pluralism, insisted on its difference from relativism (see, e.g., “Alleged Relativism in Eighteenth-Century European Thought”).

of Hellenic Greek culture. Subjectivism is a special case of relativism in which the relevant group for evaluating claims is each particular person. So the subjectivist would say that premarital sex might be immoral relative to your perspective but morally permissible relative to mine.

Non-philosophers sometimes conflate relativism with a very different position: moral isolationism. Mary Midgley came up with the term “moral isolationism” to describe the view that one should not make ethical evaluations of other cultures. Many philosophers doubt that this position is coherent.<sup>7</sup> On what *grounds* is ethically evaluating another culture ruled out in principle? I should not judge another culture if I am ignorant about it, but this is different from saying that I should never judge at all. And how does one decide what counts as a “culture” for this purpose? Contemporary anthropologists would object strongly to the suggestion that any culture has clearly defined boundaries. Can I ethically evaluate other U.S. citizens? Presumably, but what if the fellow American in question is of East-Indian descent? Does this automatically put her in another culture? I have a friend who fits into that cultural category: she has never visited India, has no interest in Indian culture, and the only Indian language she speaks is English (with a Boston accent). If I *can* ethically evaluate her, how different would she have to be before I couldn’t? If I *can’t* ethically evaluate her, does that mean that I can only ethically evaluate fellow Americans who are (like me) of joint Polish and Dutch descent? Finally, and most fundamentally, is moral isolationism the doctrine that we *cannot* ethically evaluate other cultures or that we *ought not*? It seems simply false to say that I *cannot* ethically evaluate another culture. I hereby assert: “Female circumcision is wrong.” By asserting that sentence, I just *did* ethically evaluate a culture different from my own. But if we say that we *ought not* ethically evaluate other cultures, we will be trapped by a dilemma. Very few cultures agree that it is wrong to ethically evaluate other cultures. So suppose someone from another culture asserts, “Americans are lazy.” According to moral isolationism, he ought not make that evaluation. But then moral isolationism itself entails an evaluation of him. So if we agree with moral isolationism, we must judge that a non-American who asserts “Americans are lazy” has done what is ethically wrong. But moral isolationism claims that we ought not make this judgment, which moral isolationism insists that we make.

<sup>7</sup> See Midgley, *Heart and Mind*. Bernard Williams (who refers to this position as “vulgar relativism”) describes it as “possibly the most absurd view to have been advanced even in moral philosophy” (*Morality*, p. 20).

Another common conceptual error is to conflate relativism and skepticism. Relativists acknowledge that people can be mistaken. Even if subjective relativism is true, I might be mistaken in interpreting or applying the claims that are true from my perspective. (For example, suppose that relative to my perspective stealing is wrong, but I do not consider it wrong to pilfer office supplies from work. I am mistaken even relative to my own perspective, though I do not recognize it.) Nonetheless, it is difficult to reconcile relativism with genuine skepticism. Skepticism says that you do not know whether the way things seem to you is the way they really are. But how could it be impossible for me to know the truth if the truth is relative to my own perspective? (Alternatively, if the truth is relative to the perspective of my *culture*, how could it be impossible for me to know what my culture says is right or wrong?) If relativism is true, there is nothing beyond your own (or your culture's) perspective for you to be wrong about.

Genuine pluralism is neither skepticism nor relativism. The pluralist says that there are multiple kinds of value and that they are not reducible to one kind of value. (She typically adds that it is impossible to instantiate all of these values in one life or in one society, at least not to the same degree.) Pluralism is not skepticism because the pluralist thinks we do not have any serious doubts about at least some kinds of goods. Only a dogmatic monist or an extreme skeptic could deny that a good school teacher and a good police officer both lead worthwhile lives. Pluralism is also not relativism, because the pluralist does not say that the value of either of these lives depends on our (or our culture's) point of view about them. If our culture does not appreciate the value of a good school teacher, then our culture is simply ignorant about a certain sort of value.

A concrete example may help. Suppose a friend is contemplating whether to pursue a doctorate in mathematics or begin a career as a painter. She realizes that the demands on her time and energy of being a committed mathematician or painter will preclude her being even reasonably successful if she tries to do both, so she has to choose one. She comes to us for advice. If we are a skeptic, we will tell her that some philosophers (like Plato) have presented good arguments that a life of theoretical contemplation is best, but other philosophers (like Nietzsche) have argued for the supremacy of creativity over theory. The arguments seem equally strong, so, unfortunately, we do not know what the right choice for her is or even whether there is a right choice. In contrast, if we are subjective relativists, we will tell her that whichever life she decides



is best *is* best, relative to her perspective. We may have our own opinion about her choice. Perhaps we think that mathematics is dull while art is stylish and exciting. But asking someone else for opinions about ethical value is like asking someone else what you should order for dinner. I like Spam®. (Honestly.) But that doesn't mean *you* should eat it. If our friend tells us that her parents think becoming an artist is frivolous, we should respond, "It is frivolous – relative to their perspective." (Notice how strikingly unhelpful the skeptical and relativist responses are to anyone struggling with a serious decision.)

Finally, if we are a pluralist, we will tell our friend that both the ways of life she is considering have value and are fine choices. If her parents do not appreciate the value of being an artist, that is unfortunate, but they are wrong. Then, if we are also particularists, we will look for details of her situation that may help her make her choice. Does she find that, although she has better than average talent in both, she has much more aptitude for mathematics than for painting? Does she, perhaps, admire artists more than mathematicians, but personally get more satisfaction out of teaching and researching mathematics? Mathematicians generally make their most important research contributions before the age of thirty. What does she think of studying mathematics now and keeping open the possibility of returning to painting later in life? The pluralistic particularist, if she has *zhì* 智, "wisdom," will be skillful at knowing what questions to ask.

Although marking the distinctions among relativism, skepticism, pluralism, particularism, and moral isolationism may seem overly exacting, the failure to be clear about them leads to confusion over the nature of Ruism. One should recognize that traditional Ruism is comparatively particularistic, but one should not infer on this basis that it is relativistic or pluralistic. It is a strength of traditional Ruism (I think) that it is comparatively particularistic, but a weakness that it is not more pluralistic. Making Ruism more pluralistic has nothing to do, though, with encouraging relativism or skepticism (much less moral isolationism).<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup>The postmodern Ruism of Hall and Ames offers a vision of Kongzi that sometimes seems relativistic, other times particularistic, and still other times Nietzschean in its emphasis on using the past merely as a springboard for free self-creation. My Pluralistic Ruism acknowledges the particularism of Kongzi and Mengzi but sharply distinguishes this from relativism and Nietzscheanism. In addition, I see pluralism as a friendly modification of Ruism rather than an aspect of its original formulation.

## II.B. Sexism versus Feminism

Becoming pluralistic is one way in which Ruism should overcome its ethically monistic tradition. Sexism is another aspect of this monism. Just as men's roles are highly constrained and hierarchically evaluated, so are the roles of women. Women *do* have indispensable roles to play in Ruist society. And even within the context of Ruist texts, women are sometimes singled out for praise, including times when they are ethically superior to their male relatives. Kongzi was quite willing to meet with Nanzi, a woman who was politically influential, even though the meeting scandalized his disciple Zilu (*Analects* 6.28). And Kongzi is reputed to have praised Lady Ji of Lu for her knowledge of the rites, which was supposedly better than that of her male family members. Similarly, Mengzi tells an anecdote in which a wife and concubine have a much better sense of shame (the basis of righteousness) than does their husband (*Mengzi* 4B33). And the stories told of Mengzi's mother reprimanding him (including taking the side of Mengzi's wife against him) suggest that women were viewed as independent, and sometimes superior, ethical agents.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, neither Kongzi nor Mengzi questions the fundamental distinction in gender roles between men and women. Kongzi took no female disciples and championed tradition. Mengzi said that the the roles of husband and wife are marked by "differentiation," and that a proper mother advises her daughter, as she leaves to join her husband's family for the first time, that she must be obedient (*Mengzi* 3A4.8, 3B2).

So instead of being sexist, Ruism must learn to become feminist. Some work has already been done in the direction of creating feminist Ruism.<sup>10</sup> There is nothing, I think, *essentially* sexist about Ruism. Ruism emphasizes the importance of acting in accordance with our roles. But it is not a requirement of Ruism in itself that these roles be static or attached to specific genders. (This is illustrated by the Ruist Lǐ Zhì 李贄 C.E. 1527–1602, who appeals to *yin-yang* cosmology to provide an unorthodox but challenging defense of the equality of women.)<sup>11</sup> There are also ways of constructively rereading the Ruist tradition so as to provide resources for

<sup>9</sup> On Lady Ji of Lu, see Raphals, "A Woman Who Understood the Rites." For the stories about Mengzi's mother, see *Lienü zhuan* 1.11, translated in Appendix 2 of D. C. Lau's *Mencius*. For a discussion of the representation of women in early Chinese thought, see Raphals, *Sharing the Light*. For a source book of translations, see Wang, *Images of Women in Chinese Thought and Culture*.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Li Chenyang, *The Sage and the Second Sex*, and Hall and Ames, *Thinking from the Han*, pp. 79–100.

<sup>11</sup> Li Zhi, *Fen shu*. See also Lee, "Li Zhi and John Stuart Mill."

feminism. The stories involving Kongzi and Mengzi that I mentioned are good examples of sources that stress the ethical capacity of women. In addition, my feeling is that some of the *Odes* represent a distinctive female perspective that has been ignored or de-emphasized by the mainstream commentarial tradition but can be recovered. For example, we hear, across the millennia, the voice of an abused wife in the ode “The Lad.” She sings of how kind he was to her at first:

A simple-looking lad you were,  
Carrying cloth to exchange it for silk.  
But you came not so to purchase silk –  
You came to make proposals to me.

But after she goes to live with him, his behavior changes:

When the mulberry tree sheds its leaves,  
They fall yellow on the ground.  
Since I went with you,  
Three years have I eaten of your poverty.  
And now the full waters of the Qi,  
Wet the curtains of my carriage.  
There has been no difference in me,  
But you have been double in your ways.  
It is you, Sir, who transgress the right,  
Thus changeable in your conduct.  
For three years I was your wife,  
And thought nothing of my toil in your house.  
I rose early and went to sleep late,  
Not intermitting my labours for a morning.  
Thus on my part our contract was fulfilled,  
But you have behaved thus cruelly.

She hopes for the support of her blood-relatives, but they mock her:

My brothers will not know all this,  
And will only laugh at me.  
Silently I think of it,  
And bemoan myself.<sup>12</sup>

Ruists have always looked to the *Odes* for ethical guidance, including properly training our emotions. Why should they not be used to attune us to the plight of physical and emotional abuse? Mengzi teaches us about the importance of extending benevolence. Becoming more sympathetic

<sup>12</sup> Mao 58. Translation modified from James Legge, *She King*, pp. 97–101. For another example of a woman bemoaning the sadness of her life, see “Cypress Boat” (Mao 26).

to the suffering of women, including the ways in which this suffering has been accentuated by mandated gender roles, is an important extension of benevolence.

### II.C. Epistemological Optimism versus Fallibilism

Ruism, at its best, encourages some kinds of tolerance and humility. For example, Mengzi says that “Benevolence is like archery. The archer corrects himself and lets the arrow fly. If he lets it fly and it does not hit the mark, he is not bitter at the one who defeats him, but simply seeks for the cause in himself” (2A7). Furthermore, an overlooked passage in the *Zuozhuan* provides an insightful (and canonical) defense of the right of the people to criticize their government:

A man of Jing rambled into a village school and started discoursing about the conduct of the government. In consequence Ran Ming proposed to Zichan to destroy the village schools. But the minister said, “Why do so? If people retire morning and evening and pass their judgment on the conduct of the government, as being good or bad, I will do what they approve of, and I will alter what they condemn. They are my teachers. On what ground should we destroy the schools? I have heard that by loyal conduct and goodness enmity is diminished, but I have not heard that it can be prevented by acts of violence. It may indeed be hastily stayed for a while, but it continues like a stream that has been dammed up. If you make a great opening in the dam, there will be great injury done, beyond our power to relieve. The best plan is to lead the water off by a small opening. In this case our best plan is to hear what is said and use it as a medicine.”<sup>13</sup>

In general, the use of punishment and violence is *always* regarded as the last measure to be employed by anyone who genuinely follows the Ruist Way. (The large prison population in the United States and the use of violence against the Tian'anmen Square protestors would both have been condemned by Kongzi or Mengzi.)

However, the tolerance of Ruism is limited in certain important ways by what Thomas Metzger has labeled “epistemological optimism.” Metzger coined this label to describe what he saw as a facet of the Neo- and New Confucian worldviews: the confidence that knowledge can be obtained.<sup>14</sup> Metzger saw this as distinguishing Ruism from at least modern Western thought. Pace Metzger, epistemological optimism has also

<sup>13</sup> *Zuozhuan*, Duke Xiang 31. Translation modified from James Legge, *Ch'un Ts'ew*, pp. 565–66.

<sup>14</sup> Metzger, *Escape from Predicament*.

been one aspect of Western modernity. In different ways, rationalists like Descartes and empiricists like Bacon believed that by following the right method knowledge could be given a firm foundation. (This confidence in method is part of what postmodernism is, rightly, reacting against.) However, it is also true that a significant strand in the Western tradition has challenged Western epistemological optimism on the grounds that certainty in one's convictions is ethically and politically dangerous.<sup>15</sup>

Epistemological optimism is potentially dangerous, because if I believe that my methodology guarantees truth, a natural conclusion is that I have nothing to gain from a genuine dialogue with others. If epistemological optimism is true, then my failure to convince others could only be because they are perversely obstinate. A natural practical conclusion to be drawn is that they should be silenced lest they seduce others with their errors. Likewise, if I know with certainty what the right course of action is, it seems that only cowardice could prevent me from taking the most seemingly extreme measures, if these are dictated by the right. The problem, of course, is that others are often subjectively certain of the rightness of their actions, when we know they were mistaken (the pagans who threw Christians to the lions, the Christian knights during the Crusades, the Inquisitors during the Counter-Reformation, the Nazis, the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution, the Weather Underground – pick your favorite example).

I would not recommend that Ruism become epistemologically *pessimistic*. A general skepticism about values is as ethically crippling as dogmatism. Consider a Buddho-Confucian scholar like Tan Sitong, who went to his death, fighting for good government in China, or Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Protestant minister who was executed by the Nazis for trying to save Jews. Would either of these have had such courage if they had thought, "Well, I don't *know* whether oppressing others is really bad. I mean, sure, it seems that way to me. But, hey, who's to say?" Fanatical certainty in one's own convictions is ethically dangerous, but I worry that the hot-tub skepticism fashionable today may be dangerous in its own way.

Ruism should eschew both skepticism and epistemological optimism in favor of fallibilism, the claim that we can know that some things are

<sup>15</sup>This trend has a long pedigree. Augustine stresses the fact that reason is corrupted by original sin. Consequently, we cannot fully trust our own reason, nor can we hope to persuade everyone else. Augustine recognizes that this has political implications. Thus, when Augustine distinguishes the City of God from the City of Man, he is calling into question the possibility of one order for both ethics and government.

true but we cannot (generally speaking) have absolute certainty, so we must always be willing to reexamine and revise our beliefs.<sup>16</sup> Living up to epistemological fallibilism is what Aristotelians would describe as a “theoretical virtue,” since it deals with the capacity of the mind to know. However, it is intimately connected with “practical virtues.” It requires great humility, courage, and discipline to actually acknowledge in practice that one is fallible. All of us fail at this some of the time, and many of us fail at it persistently, even while we are mouthing support for open-mindedness.

Epistemological fallibilism does not require perfect impartiality. As Kant argued theoretically and as Thomas Kuhn illustrated historically, perfect impartiality is impossible. However, epistemological fallibilism does require sympathetic understanding and dialogical argumentation. Sympathetically understanding the positions of our interlocutors requires that we see why they – as rational, fellow human beings – see the world as they do. Their errors must be explicable as something other than the expressions of their vices. This is true even (perhaps especially) when we find their views abhorrent. In general, if you do not understand why large numbers of people are attracted to a position with which you disagree, you have not thought carefully enough about it. To invoke the language of Kuhn, one has to develop the habit of learning to see the world through alternative paradigms.

There are, of course, limitations to sympathetic understanding. It is ethically dangerous to come to see the world as a white supremacist. And it would be naive, in many cases, to rule out the use of hermeneutics of suspicion to expain people’s beliefs. But part of treating another human with respect is acting *as if* he is rational. (After all, we are not fully rational ourselves, but we expect our views and our arguments to be treated as serious positions, not as symptoms of our hidden motivations.) So the decision to completely abandon a hermeneutics of restoration in regard to interpreting any particular text or individual must be made rarely and reluctantly.

For the majority of cases, in which sympathetic understanding is a goal, we must combine that understanding with dialogical argumentation. To argue dialogically is to respond to the arguments and objections of our interlocutors in a manner that is not satisfying only for us, but also, in principle, intelligible and persuasive from the perspective of our

<sup>16</sup>For an early exposition and defense of this view, see C. S. Peirce, “Fallibilism, Continuity, and Evolution.”

interlocutors. Dialogical argumentation also requires that we solicit the responses of our interlocutors to our own objections and arguments. Again, as a general rule, if you do not know what your interlocutor would say in reply to your arguments, you do not have good reason for holding your own beliefs.

None of this can be done perfectly, completely, or algorithmically. On most vexing questions, we will never persuade most of our interlocutors. The most we can hope is that we have responded to their objections in ways that *ought* to convince them. But we can never be certain that we have done so, since there is no definitive test of when they *ought* to be convinced. Likewise, there is no test to be sure that we have adequately understood alternative positions. And we cannot call into question everything, all the time, or consider every possible alternative position. Consequently, it requires wisdom to know when systematic understanding and dialogic argumentation have reached a tentative conclusion. (And it requires wisdom again to know when dialogue should be reopened.)

## II.D. Virtue *and* Procedural Justice

As I have presented it, Ruism is a form of virtue ethics. Virtue ethics is an ethical approach for individuals, but it also has political implications. Minimally, if any form of virtue ethics is right, it seems that it is a requirement of a legitimate political system that it make it at least *possible* to become virtuous. As John Dewey observed, "It is self-contradictory to say there is not true morality without personal insight and choice, and yet practically endure conditions of social life which shut most men out from the possibility of meeting these requirements."<sup>17</sup> More substantially, we might see it as an obligation of a political system to *promote* virtue. However, this obligation is, I think, more likely to need to be balanced against other desiderata of a political system. For example, it might very well be that encouraging virtue is in tension with the demand to avoid too extreme an epistemological optimism. Perhaps encouraging virtue to a certain high degree is warranted only if we are quite certain that doing so will not discourage alternative ways of life that might be, for all we know, virtuous. Many people in our society act as if they were quite certain that promoting, at the least, some version of Christianity is an ethical obligation of government. On the other hand, many intellectuals in academia seem to take it as one of their primary educational tasks to disabuse their

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy*, p. 48.

students of the last shred of religious belief (or at least Christian belief). Each of these groups has great confidence in their own access to ethical truth.

Beyond permitting or encouraging virtue, Ruism (in common with some versions of Western virtue ethics) envisions a *constitutive* role for virtue in governing. Kongzi hoped to train virtuous individuals who could be trusted with government power, including a very wide degree of discretionary authority. To be sure, Ruist kings and their ministers are limited in their actions by ritual and tradition. But the whole point of being particularistic is that these constraints are flexible, depending on the specific circumstances. The attraction of this political particularism is, of course, that a genuinely virtuous and wise government official has the authority needed to achieve the good. The danger is that those with less-than-sagacious virtue may misuse their authority, either by giving in to the temptations of bribes of wealth, power, or favors, or through simple error (the well-intentioned judge assuming that he need not investigate any further, because the answer seems quite clear to him).

So what more is needed beyond virtue? Procedural justice obtains when there are public rules that are followed consistently. Procedural justice is an institutional good that has been underemphasized by Ruists historically. Obviously, some procedural rules are worse than nothing. No matter how consistent one is in applying "trial by ordeal" to suspected witches, it's a bad idea. But many of the procedures surrounding due process in U.S. courts, or how to resolve a Constitutional crisis over vote-counting, or even how to get a driver's license, provide individuals with *some* protection against the arbitrary use of authority. It is easy to underestimate the value of procedural justice, emphasizing that it not infrequently fails in one of two ways. Sometimes procedural justice fails when, precisely because it *is* followed, it fails to achieve either efficiency or substantive justice or both. Anyone who has had significant dealings with either their state Department of Motor Vehicles or the post office is aware that the problem is typically not that procedural justice is flouted, but that it is followed to the point of madness. In addition, we can all cite our own personal favorite case of the guilty going free or the innocent being punished despite procedural justice.

Ruists would also emphasize another way in which procedural justice can fail: procedural justice cannot exist without at least minimally virtuous individuals to implement it. Rules against taking bribes are meaningless unless enough people have the righteousness that makes them ashamed to be bribed, or ashamed to not enforce the punishments when others violate the rules. Furthermore, a Ruist who had read Wittgenstein



would note that a rule does not tell you how or when to apply it.<sup>18</sup> No matter how much case law there is, and no matter how specific the statutes, a judge needs wisdom to know when, and when not, to sustain an objection or exclude evidence.

But there is an important difference between minimal and sagacious virtue. As Han Feizi pointed out in his criticism of Ruism, government cannot rely on having sages, since they are so rare. Most rulers are neither sages like kings Yao and Shun nor are they tyrants like Jie and Zhou. If mediocre rulers

hold to the law and depend on the power of their position [instead of the charisma of numinous Virtue], there will be order; but if they abandon the power of their position and turn their backs on the law, there will be disorder. Now if one abandons the power of position, turns one's back on the law, and waits for a Yao or Shun, then when a Yao or Shun arrives there will indeed be order, but it will only be one generation of order in a thousand generations of disorder.<sup>19</sup>

And my own experience with academic politics (where, as the saying goes, the battles are so ruthless because the stakes are so insignificant) has given me increased appreciation for the protection given by clear rules that people are just too ashamed to violate. This is why I have entitled this subsection "virtue *and* procedural justice." For although I think Ruism gives too little emphasis to procedural justice and places too much confidence in the discretionary authority of the supposedly virtuous, I think it is right that procedural justice requires at least minimal virtue to operate.<sup>20</sup>

In summary, in order to be credible or plausible for us today, Ruism must adapt to become compatible with democracy and modern science (as the New Confucians have stressed), as well as with pluralism, feminism, epistemological fallibilism, and procedural justice.

### III. THE ROAD AHEAD

I have discussed some of the ways that Ruism should learn from the heritage of the Western Enlightenment. But is Ruism also inspiring for

<sup>18</sup> David Wong does, in fact, make just this point ("Reasons and Analogical Reasoning in Mengzi," pp. 205–6).

<sup>19</sup> Han Feizi 8, "A Critique of the Doctrine of the Power of Position," *Readings*, pp. 330–31.

<sup>20</sup> I do not mean to suggest that the Ruist tradition has been completely ignorant of procedural justice. One of the achievements of Han Dynasty philosophy was to synthesize Ruism with elements of "Legalist" thought, including a more procedural approach to government. This was philosophically brilliant, historically significant, and (on the whole) socially beneficial.

us today? What does Ruism have to offer modernity? This depends on which Ruist philosopher we are talking about, of course. Here I shall limit myself to a discussion of the possible contributions of a neo-Mengzian virtue ethics.

### III.A. Human Nature and Self-Cultivation

#### *III.A.1. Mengzian Naturalism*

Mengzi's conception of human nature and self-cultivation, especially when it is distinguished from the later School of the Way interpretations of it, is both plausible and challenging.<sup>21</sup> The notion that we have innate but incipient tendencies toward virtue and that these tendencies have a natural pattern of development is perhaps unique. As MacIntyre points out, the tendency among modern Western ethical views is to dispense with the notion of potentiality. Human nature is reduced to mere uncultivated actuality. Consequently, modern Western ethical views from Hobbes to Moore and beyond emphasize discovery models of self-cultivation. (Ironically, this makes them similar, if only in a bare structural way, to the School of the Way approaches.) The earlier virtue ethics approaches of the West, which MacIntyre champions, do stress the transition from potentiality to actuality. However, Aristotle himself had, like Xunzi, an almost pure re-formation model, according to which human nature has no (or nothing more than the most inchoate) tendencies toward virtue. We must be reshaped through habituation (and ritual, in Xunzi's case) so as to acquire virtuous feelings, perceptions, and dispositions. Ironically, those in the Western Platonistic tradition often have developmental aspects to their thought that give them some structural similarity to the Mengzian position. For Plato (and to some extent for Augustine and Aquinas), becoming virtuous is just discovering something you already "know." But this discovery occurs as a result of a developmental process, and as in the case of Mengzi, one starts out, from birth, with the first stage in the process already completed. However, as the postmodernists would be quick to point out, Platonists are quite different from Ruists of any variety. For Platonists, ethical cultivation is still discovery rather than development. And Platonists always place a greater emphasis than do Ruists on theoretical activity, both in ethical cultivation and in the life that one leads as a result of having been cultivated.

<sup>21</sup> For a discussion of the contemporary philosophical viability of the School of the Way, see Van Norden, "What Is Living and What Is Dead in the Philosophy of Zhu Xi?"

In contrast, for Mengzi, as we have seen, ethical cultivation requires a much more significant emphasis on carefully guiding and training the emotions.

Furthermore, the general issue of how to become a better person has received little attention in Anglo-American philosophy in the last century. Philosophers have almost conceded this topic to psychologists and pop self-help gurus. This is unfortunate, both because philosophers had traditionally addressed this sort of question, even in the West, and because the particular argumentative and systematizing skills that philosophers are trained in might help enrich this discussion. I hope we can see a revival of philosophical interest in techniques of ethical cultivation and self-cultivation, and along with it discussions of human nature.

I also hope that this revival of discussion of ethical cultivation will be accompanied by an increased attention to the rhetoric of persuasion. Contemporary Anglo-American philosophers are often phenomenally good at tight, logical argumentation. They are also typically good at “silencing” others in debate. But silencing is not the same as persuading. If we silence someone in debate, we have produced an argument that he does not know how to answer. But this does not entail that he has come to believe our conclusion. Much less does it entail that he will be motivated to act differently. On the other hand, if we persuade someone, she has come to accept the truth of our conclusion.<sup>22</sup>

Mengzi, as we have seen, was an incisive practitioner of philosophical argumentation. However, he also had a unique talent at writing to persuade. There is, of course, no guarantee that persuasion will lead to action. But action seems more likely than it does in cases in which persuasion has not occurred. In general, if we philosophers want to make a difference in the world, we have to get better at persuading: arguing in ways that actually have a chance at changing the minds of others. This will involve such things as developing a better sense for how our arguments affect the emotions of others. (In other words, how can we use cognitive extension to enable affective extension?) It will also involve

<sup>22</sup> I have in mind here rational persuasion, in which we get someone to accept our conclusion for good reasons. I realize there are many complex and disputed issues regarding how to distinguish rational persuasion from other kinds. I do not have the space to enter into these issues here. I will limit myself to the observation that we all do, in fact, distinguish between cases of someone being persuaded justifiably and their being persuaded unjustifiably. (This is so whether we can agree on a general account of what marks this distinction.)

actually listening to and understanding how most other people think. Ruists, like all intellectuals, have sometimes ascended to rarified heights from which the voices of “the people” are inaudible. But for the most part Ruists have been “public intellectuals,” and very successful ones, for over two thousand years.

The difference between silencing and persuading is related to the difference between two styles of ethical reasoning. A modern metaphor may help to illuminate the distinction I have in mind. Contrast theoretical physics and engineering. In theoretical physics, one attempts to arrive at highly general claims, often through deductive proof. Equations in theoretical physics give the general relations of force to mass and acceleration, energy to mass, gravity to mass and distance, and so forth. In contrast, in engineering, one is faced with a concrete problem and attempts to find a specific solution. For example, a civil engineer may be asked to design a bridge that spans a river. She will need to know what kind of vehicles (of what weight and number) will use the bridge, how many lanes of traffic the bridge is to accommodate, how wide the river is, what the budget and timetable for completing the bridge are, and so on. She will then design a particular bridge, given these particular constraints, and these particular desiderata. Now, is ethical reasoning more like theoretical physics or more like engineering? I suspect that many philosophers have had physics in the back of their minds as a paradigm for what methodology ethics should employ: both should be general, abstract, and formulated in clear rules. But thinking of ethical reasoning as like engineering may be more accurate. If ethical reasoning is something that we actually employ in our lives, then we *are* dealing with particular desiderata and particular constraints. The focus on these particulars may give us solutions that are both more faithful to the context and more likely to persuade others.

The ethics-as-engineering metaphor is multidimensional. Another dimension of similarity is revealed when we consider the relationship between theoretical physics and engineering. The two are not identical. Some results in physics have no engineering applications or their applications are not discovered for years. And engineering, in a broad sense, existed long before physics as an autonomous discipline did. However, the two fields are related. Concrete engineering problems (how does one aim a canonball correctly?) stimulated the development of kinematics and dynamics in the early modern era. Conversely, engineers continually make use of results from physics in designing bridges, lighting systems, and so on. Similarly, taking an ethics-as-engineering approach does not

rule out more abstract and general discussions of ethics completely. For example, I think much of my discussion of Mengzi in this chapter is fairly abstract. But (although I certainly may be mistaken in the *way* in which I have carried out this discussion), I do not think it is impossible *in principle* to have a somewhat abstract, yet still fruitful, discussion of what the desirable features of a virtue ethics are.

As our earlier discussion of the limitations of Ruism suggests, Mengzi's position must be modified in certain ways. His primary metaphor for ethical cultivation is the cultivation of plants. Even within particular plant species, there is some variation. Because of conditions of sun, shade, wind, and rain, this flower grows tall in one direction, whereas another flower is shorter and turns in another direction. Still, paradigmatic instances of plants do not differ too much. One stalk of hearty, healthy millet is pretty much like any other one. And the sprout of a willow tree does not grow to become a mulberry tree, no matter how we manipulate its environment or cultivate it. So Mengzi's sprout metaphor suggests that there is one proper course of human development and one proper goal. This is an example of Ruist monism. Instead, we should come to think of human ethical cultivation in pluralistic terms. One aspect of this pluralism is the recognition that our choices among good lives endow the things we choose with agent-relative value, because they become our *aspirations*. Had Lance Armstrong decided to retire from competitive cycling after he developed testicular cancer, I do not think he would have been making an unworthy choice. He could have led some other sort of worthwhile life. But once he decided to return to competitive cycling and enter the Tour de France, succeeding in his chosen way of life came to have special value, precisely because it was his choice.

Good lives will be similar in certain respects. Specifically, each will manifest, to some degree, the Mengzian cardinal virtues. But these manifestations can take quite different forms in different kinds of good lives. I hope these claims will become somewhat clearer as I discuss the Mengzian cardinal virtues and conceptions of human flourishing (in §§III.B–III.C).

### *III.A.2. Responses to Some Common Objections to Mengzi's View*

Even when Mengzi's position is modified in the direction of pluralism, the appeal to human nature as a foundation for ethics invites several kinds of objections. Obviously, I cannot definitively refute the more powerful of these objections in the space of one chapter. However, I would like to sketch the beginnings of responses to these objections, because it is often

assumed that they are definitive and unanswerable. I want to, at the least, motivate a reasonable doubt that the case against Mengzian naturalism has been proven.

*Objection:* Becoming virtuous cannot be natural, because (as Mengzi acknowledges) it typically requires education and a cultural context conducive to it. Something similar to this objection was formulated by Xúnzǐ 荀子.<sup>23</sup> *Response:* Natural characteristics and activities can require nurturing and education in order to develop, even among nonhuman animals.<sup>24</sup> For example, in order to realize its nature, a cat must receive not only water and food (of sufficient quantity and quality) but also the nurturing of another cat (usually its mother) for at least two, and usually closer to six, months after birth in order to have a good chance of survival.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, cats are unlikely to learn how to hunt and eat their prey unless shown how to hunt by other cats.<sup>26</sup> So for cats (as for humans) a healthy environment involves active nurturing and even education by other members of their species.<sup>27</sup>

Consequently, it is a misunderstanding to claim that a trait cannot be natural simply because it requires a certain level of nurturing or education in order for it to develop.

*Objection:* The effort to derive conclusions about what humans should do or what characteristics they ought to have from claims about human nature violates the fact-value distinction (or the is-ought distinction). Something like this seems to be one of Chad Hansen's major objections to Mengzi's view: "Mencius confuses his implausibly [*sic*] specific moral psychology with normative theory."<sup>28</sup> "In standard philosophical terminology, Mencius . . . is trying to get an *ought* from an *is*."<sup>29</sup> *Response:* Hume is often taken to have established the is-ought distinction in his *A Treatise of Human Nature*. However, it is controversial what this distinction is, whether it exists, and even whether Hume himself wished to endorse

<sup>23</sup> Xunzi 23, "Human Nature Is Bad."

<sup>24</sup> Graham both notes this fact and anticipates the response I outline here ("Background of the Mencian Theory of Human Nature," pp. 28–29).

<sup>25</sup> Morris, *Catwatching*, pp. 91–92.

<sup>26</sup> "Although it is clear that there is an inborn killing pattern with kittens, this pattern can be damaged by unnatural rearing conditions. Conversely, really efficient killers have to experience a kittenhood that exposes them to as much hunting and killing as possible" (Morris, *Catwatching*, p. 96; see also *ibid.*, pp. 77–78).

<sup>27</sup> For an intriguing discussion of whether cats also have "cultures," see Thomas, *Tribe of Tiger*, especially pp. 109–13.

<sup>28</sup> Hansen, *Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, p. 168.

<sup>29</sup> Hansen, *Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, p. 180 (emphasis in original).

it.<sup>30</sup> One way of explaining the distinction is that one cannot validly derive any conclusion that is evaluative from any set of premises that are completely nonevaluative (i.e., have no evaluative content whatsoever).<sup>31</sup> Now, Mengzi would have violated the distinction (thus interpreted) *if* he regarded the notion of human nature as completely nonevaluative but then attempted to draw evaluative conclusions from that conception of human nature. However, it seems clear that Mengzi regards the notion of human nature as already evaluative. For Mengzi, to say that X is an aspect of human nature is to say that it is good for humans to develop X. But then Mengzi is not attempting to derive an evaluative conclusion from a set of purely descriptive premises. Rather, he is deriving some normative conclusions from others.

One might then present a follow-up objection that Mengzi ought to use only a value-neutral conception of human nature. But is there such a conception? James Wallace has argued that any “study of living creatures as such, including modern biology, inevitably involves normative considerations.”<sup>32</sup> After all, in describing and classifying animals, we do not focus on injured specimens, or even the statistically most common specimen (since in many species the majority of newborn animals do not survive to adulthood). And even if Wallace is wrong about *biology*, Mengzi is not trying to do biology as we understand it. On what grounds do we deny Mengzi, in principle, any appeal to a philosophical anthropology that includes a specifically *normative* conception of human nature?

Consequently, even if there is a fact-value dichotomy, Mengzi does not violate it, because he is not attempting to deduce normative claims from nonnormative ones.

<sup>30</sup> See Hume, *Treatise*, III.i.1, for the locus classicus. Mackie presents a sympathetic account of Hume’s view but acknowledges that it “leaves open the possibility that there should be objectively prescriptive moral truths” (*Hume’s Moral Theory*, p. 63). Searle, “How to Derive ‘Ought’ from ‘Is,’” is a famous but controversial argument that the is-ought gap can be bridged. Gewirth, “‘Is/Ought’ Problem Resolved,” reviews a variety of arguments that the gap can be bridged. Porter, *Recovery of Virtue*, pp. 43–48, discusses some Thomistic perspectives on this issue. Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, pp. 127–49 presents a sort of neo-Peircean attack on the fact-value distinction.

<sup>31</sup> The is-ought distinction is too big an issue to address adequately here. I shall content myself with observing that if we phrase the distinction as I did above, then I believe that it is true. However, it then seems trivial. Consider an analogy. I cannot derive any conclusions about dolphins from any set of premises that make no reference to dolphins. This does not show anything interesting about the ontological status of dolphins or about the semantic status of claims made about them.

<sup>32</sup> Wallace, *Virtues and Vices*, p. 18.

*Objection:* Mengzi's view of human nature is logically circular, because a natural way of life is defined in terms of a thing's potential and healthy conditions of development, but a thing's potential and its healthy conditions of development are identified in terms of the resulting natural way of life. A. C. Graham seems to reject Mengzi's view for this reason.<sup>33</sup>

*Response:* This objection assumes that there is something suspect about adjusting theoretical concepts in the light of one another. However, I subscribe to the now-common view that we must accept some version of theoretical holism. For example, in physics, the concepts of space, time, mass, and energy are interrelated. Consequently, the shift from Newtonian to Einsteinian physics required a simultaneous adjustment of our understanding of each of these concepts in the light of the others. A further holism is introduced if we reject (as I think we should) the "myth of the given." In other words, our observations are *not* theoretically innocent and incorrigible reports or pure sense experience. Rather, all our observations are theory-laden, made in terms of some background theoretical beliefs. The Michelson-Morely experiments were taken to provide empirical evidence for Special Relativity. But even the most basic observations involved in these experiments (e.g., the absence of interference patterns) were comprehensible only against a background of theoretical beliefs. So not only are theoretical concepts defined (and hence modified) in relation to one another, but observations and theoretical concepts cannot be neatly separated, so they must be defined and modified in terms of one another too.<sup>34</sup>

Holism does not, I think, make our theories contentless and subjective. We can evaluate our (comparatively) theoretical beliefs in the light of (comparatively) empirical evidence, and some conceivable theoretical adjustments can be ruled out as ad hoc or otherwise implausible. We also interpret and evaluate putative evidence in the light of our theoretical commitments. Similarly, the relationship between our understandings of a healthy environment and of human nature are holistic since we

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Graham, "Background of the Mencian Theory of Human Nature," pp. 14–15.

<sup>34</sup> As Quine famously wrote, it is "folly to seek a boundary between synthetic statements, which hold contingently on experience, and analytic statements, which hold come what may. Any statement can be held true come what may, if we make drastic enough adjustments elsewhere in the system [of our statements]. Even a statement very close to the [experiential] periphery [of our system] can be held true in the face of recalcitrant experience by pleading hallucination or by amending certain statements of the kind called logical laws. Conversely, by the same token, no statement is immune to revision" ("Two Dogmas of Empiricism," p. 43).



interpret each in the light of the other. This does not mean that every adjustment of the two notions is equally plausible. Furthermore, empirical data can lead us to modify our understandings of these two concepts. Specifically, in Chapter 4, §III, I gave an example of how certain empirical discoveries might provide evidence against Mengzi's view. Here is another example, on a different topic, further illustrating how a notion of "normalcy" might be successfully challenged by empirical evidence: it was commonly believed at one time that homosexuality is the result of an abnormal childhood sexual development and that it was part of a larger fabric of psychological problems. However, evidence suggests no correlation between either of these factors and homosexuality. These factors do not make it impossible to continue to hold that homosexuality is unnatural, but they do make it considerably less plausible.

Consequently, the mere fact that Mengzi's key concepts are inter-defined does not entail that they are empirically vacuous or viciously circular.

*Objection:* The notion of naturalness assumes a teleological worldview, which is metaphysically implausible. *Response:* Mengzi's worldview is teleological in the sense that living things (at least) are intentionally created (by Heaven) to meet certain standards. However, an appeal to human nature does not *require* a worldview that is teleological in this particular way. All that naturalness requires metaphysically is that there be, for a given kind of living thing, certain facts about its pattern of development to maturity, its characteristics and activities when mature, and the environmental conditions that allow for these. Evolutionary theory could be used to provide a nonteleological explanation for why these facts obtain.

In particular, Mengzi's conception of human nature asserts that humans have incipient dispositions toward benevolence, righteousness (a sense of shame), and some other virtues. Biology offers three evolutionary explanations for why we find such ethical dispositions in humans and some other animals (despite the fact that such inclinations often seem to reduce the likelihood of their owner's survival): kin selection, reciprocal altruism, and group selection.<sup>35</sup> To understand the mechanism of kin selection, suppose that I am disposed to share my resources with my own

<sup>35</sup> Charles Darwin adumbrated all three of these explanations in his *Descent of Man*, Part I, Chapters 4–5, pp. 100–38. For recent papers and discussion, see Katz, ed., *Evolutionary Origins of Morality*.

kin and to risk my life to protect them. Even if these dispositions make it less likely that I will survive to pass on my genes, these dispositions make it more likely that my kin will survive to pass on their genes, and kin are genetically quite similar. Consequently, ethical dispositions end up being more likely to be transmitted.<sup>36</sup>

Reciprocal altruism occurs when animals perform some service(s) for one another under the following conditions: there is a cost to the performer of the service but a benefit for the receiver, and there is a time-lag between performing the service and receiving it back oneself. Reciprocal altruism can be adaptive if there is a sufficient degree of reliability that others will reciprocate. It is possible for reciprocal altruism to occur among purely self-interested animals. However, such an arrangement is highly unstable. Effective long-term employment of reciprocal altruism is facilitated by dispositions such as honesty, loyalty, and benevolence. Consequently, insofar as reciprocal altruism increases a creature's chance of survival, the dispositions that support it will be selected for.<sup>37</sup>

Group altruism is the most controversial of the three mechanisms; many biologists deny that it occurs. However, Darwin himself argued that a "tribe" among whom dispositions such as courage are comparatively more common is more likely to survive than its neighbors, and hence the members of the tribe are more likely to pass on the genes that account for these dispositions.<sup>38</sup>

Consequently, we do not need a specifically teleological metaphysics in order to make sense of Mengzi's view. Though evolutionary biology does not entail the details of Mengzi's position, it does provide a non-teleological explanation of why humans could have "sprouts of virtue."

*Objection:* The only kind of ethics that respects the dignity of a person is one that grounds all morality in a human's free choices. A person should, of course, make informed choices that take into account information about her own psychology, as well as facts about the culture of which she is a part and its history and traditions. However, it is not only illegitimate, but also morally objectionable, to attempt to arrive at any conclusions about what one ought to do based on anything external to one's own freely choosing will. (Some philosophers will make this point by saying that a morality that tries to judge human choices by anything external to that choice is "heteronomous" or that a person who tries

<sup>36</sup>For a popular explanation of kin selection, see Ridley, *Origins of Virtue*.

<sup>37</sup>A classic paper on this topic is Trivers, "Evolution of Reciprocal Altruism."

<sup>38</sup>For a contemporary defense of group selection, see Sober and Wilson, *Unto Others*.

to shift the responsibility for her choices to anything beyond herself is “inauthentic.”) I think that it is partly this intuition that leads Roger Ames to describe a position like the one I find in Mengzi “repugnant.”<sup>39</sup> *Response*: Any ethics of human nature suggests that we are ethically bound by something other than our own freely choosing will, so such an ethics must be heteronomous in the technical Kantian sense or inauthentic in the Sartrean sense. However, many of us are unsatisfied with Kantian or existentialist foundations for ethics. Charles Taylor has brilliantly documented the way in which the conception of a self that stresses “autonomy” and “authenticity” is the product of a parochial historical progression in the West.<sup>40</sup> Taylor also gives powerful arguments that it is ultimately incoherent to suggest that moral value comes solely from free individual choice. After all, if nothing has value independently of our choices, what difference does it make what we choose? But it seems that it often does make a great deal of difference what we choose. This is why our choices are often momentous.<sup>41</sup> At the very least, I would say that an ethics of human nature like Mengzi’s is a helpful corrective to the extreme emphasis on individual choice found in many modern Western moral views.

In addition, there is a way in which an ethics of human nature can satisfy part of the intuition that may underlie the view that heteronomy is bad. Since an ethics of human nature is based on facts about *our* characteristics, needs, and processes of development as human beings, it is not imposed on us as something alien to us as embodied, natural creatures. This will not satisfy a strict Kantian (or his cousin, the Sartrean existentialist), but it may help address one intuition that leads people down those paths.

<sup>39</sup> Ames, “Mencius and Process Notion of Human Nature,” p. 74. Ames does not use this as the basis for a criticism of Mengzi but instead as a motivation for reading Mengzi in an alternative way.

<sup>40</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*. The fact that our current conceptions of “autonomy” and “authenticity,” and the ethical intuitions that go with them, are very recent Western inventions should make us cautious about accepting any interpretation of native Chinese philosophy that stresses similar intuitions.

<sup>41</sup> To illustrate our radical freedom to choose, Sartre gives the example of young man in France under the Nazi occupation, trying to decide whether to stay and care for his aged mother or go and join the Resistance. Most of us would share Sartre’s intuition that there is no one “right” choice in this situation. (And when I say “most of us,” I do not include most Ruists, who I think would almost certainly favor staying to care for one’s aged mother.) However, as Taylor observes, we can imagine a number of other choices (e.g., becoming a collaborator with the Nazis) that would seem like simply wrong choices, even if the young man freely chose them. See Sartre, “Humanism of Existentialism,” pp. 42–44, and Taylor, “What Is Human Agency?” p. 29ff.

Consequently, Mengzi's view is indeed inconsistent with a radical view of human autonomy, but this is not necessarily a disadvantage of Mengzi's view. There is good reason for rejecting the sort of emphasis on radical autonomy that Mengzi's view challenges.

*Objection:* Study of other cultures has demonstrated that there is no such thing as human nature, or at least that there is insufficient content to human nature to provide a basis for any substantive ethical claims. A similar line of argument to this was used by the Chinese Mohists prior to Mengzi, but it is more familiar to most Westerners as a conclusion of cross-cultural anthropology.<sup>42</sup> *Response:* Although this argument is often used in a facile way, it is potentially much more powerful than the previous objections we have considered. However, anthropological opinion on this topic has vacillated. Nineteenth-century anthropology largely ignored the great variety in what appear to be healthy and successful ways of life in favor of Procrustean developmental patterns that located contemporary Western cultures at the apex and relegated other cultures (and earlier stages in Western culture) to lower rungs on the latter. In reaction against this, twentieth-century anthropology, of which the work of Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict is paradigmatic, has stressed cross-cultural variety to the point of suggesting (sometimes) that human nature is infinitely malleable.<sup>43</sup> However, many of the paradigmatic studies that were used to support this claim have been shown to be unreliable, including Mead's study of adolescent sexuality in Samoa, Benedict's studies of Japanese culture, Benjamin Whorf's study of the Hopi language, and Bronislaw Malinowski's supposed counterexample to the Oedipus Complex among the Trobriand.<sup>44</sup> (Even the favorite cocktail-party example of cultural relativism, that Eskimos have 32 words for "snow," has turned out to be a myth.)<sup>45</sup> As a result, some have come to agree with anthropologist Donald E. Brown, who has made the (admittedly controversial) claim that "Whatever the motive may be for resisting the idea that there is a human nature whose features shape culture and society, its intellectual foundations have all but collapsed."<sup>46</sup> Equally controversial is Brown's claim that there is some evidence for a list of universal or nearly universal

<sup>42</sup> For the Mohist view, see Chapter 3, §V.F.

<sup>43</sup> See Mead, *Coming of Age in Samoa*, Benedict, *Patterns of Culture*, and Brown, *Human Universals*, Chapter 3.

<sup>44</sup> See Freeman, *Margaret Mead and Samoa*, Malotki, *Hopi Time*, Spiro, *Oedipus in the Trobriands*, and Brown, *Human Universals*, chapter 1.

<sup>45</sup> Martin, "Eskimo Words for Snow."

<sup>46</sup> Brown, *Human Universals*, p. 144.

characteristics of human societies: the use of narrative and poetry, facial expressions such as smiling and crying, marriage (in some form), incest taboos (especially against mother-son incest), rituals (of some form) to mourn the dead, rules (of some kind) regulating theft and the use of violence, and others.<sup>47</sup> More recently, psychologist Paul Ekman has concluded, on the basis of decades of empirical research, that the facial expressions of seven emotions are universal across cultures: anger, happiness, fear, surprise, disgust, sadness, and contempt.<sup>48</sup> (Interestingly, the *Record of Rites* gives a list of seven “passions,” four of which clearly overlap Ekman’s list: happiness, anger, sadness, fear, love, dislike, and desire.)<sup>49</sup> One more example: not only is the use of metaphor a cultural universal, but the actual *content* of metaphors shows a surprising level of commonality across time and cultures.<sup>50</sup>

Although research has disproven the radical *tabula rasa* view of human nature, this does not entail that earlier, monistic views of human nature are correct: human nature is not fully determinate across time and culture. Instead, it seems that human nature has only a thin content, which must be filled in with the thick details of particular cultural practices and individual choices. For example, every culture has rituals to mourn the dead, but the form that these take will vary. Every culture has the institution of marriage, but we should not expect that wedding rituals and the rules governing divorce will be uniform. In other words, the empirical evidence seems to support pluralism rather than relativism.

I think we should walk away from this controversy with at least two lessons. First, anthropological studies are relevant to the issue of whether there is a human nature and, if so, what its content might be, so it would be irresponsible for those working on ethics of human nature to ignore them. Second, it is premature to conclude that the nonexistence of human nature has been demonstrated; the controversy is very much a live one.

<sup>47</sup> Brown, *Human Universals*, Chapter 6.

<sup>48</sup> Ekman, *Emotions Revealed*.

<sup>49</sup> Lǐjì 禮記, “Lǐ yun.” Recall that the term “dislike” (wù 惡) can cover the senses of “disgust” and “contempt” (Chapter 4, §V.B.2). In addition, “desire” does not make Ekman’s list of universal emotions, but this is because the Chinese notion of “passions” is a broader concept than that of “emotions.” Finally, I find it hard to believe that “love” is not a universal human emotion. So there is perhaps even more correspondence between the two lists than there seems at first.

<sup>50</sup> For a discussion and references to some of the relevant literature, see Slingerland, *Effortless Action*, pp. 25–27.

Let me stress again that I know I have not definitively refuted any of these objections to Mengzi's conception of human nature (much less answered every possible objection). However, I hope I have at least made clear that a neo-Mengzian model of human nature and a developmental picture of ethical cultivation are defensible and worthy of further philosophical exploration and elaboration.

### III.B. The Virtues

In the West, Plato provided one of the most influential lists of the cardinal virtues: wisdom, justice, courage, and moderation. Aristotle divided virtues into two broad classes, intellectual virtues and virtues of character. However, he gave a longer and potentially open-ended list of virtues. Aquinas adopts Plato's list of four virtues, but specifies that these are the four natural virtues, which must be supplemented with the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. Aquinas then skilfully explains how other virtues are "parts" of one of these cardinal virtues. There are two principles by which these thinkers assure the completeness of their lists. On the one hand, they tie specific virtues to human psychological faculties. This is perhaps most prominent in Plato, for whom wisdom is the excellence of the rational part of the soul, courage is the excellence of the "spirited" part of the soul, moderation is the excellence achieved when the spirited and appetitive parts of the soul are in harmony with the rational part of the soul, and justice is the excellence achieved when no part of the soul tries to do the job of any of the other parts. The other principle for assuring the completeness of the lists is dividing human life into spheres of action and experience. Aristotle emphasizes this to a greater degree than does Plato. So courage is the excellence that deals with situations in which significant goods are at risk, especially one's life, whereas "humility" is the excellence that deals with situations in which social honors are at stake. For Plato, these would both count as "courage," since they are excellences of the spirited part of the soul. Nonetheless, it would be an oversimplification to claim that Plato uses only the psychological-faculty principle, whereas Aristotle uses only the spheres-of-experience principle. They (and Aquinas) appeal to both principles, but to varying extents. The flexibility and power of Plato's list of cardinal virtues (especially as expanded by Aquinas) has been well demonstrated. However, I think that the Mengzian list of cardinal virtues is also illuminating and is more intuitive in some ways.

In the case of both Mengzi and his School of the Way followers, the division of virtues is almost exclusively in terms of spheres of experience.

Mengzi does mark a division among human faculties. On the one hand, there is the heart, the “greater part” of oneself, which is the seat of our cognitive emotions; on the other hand, there are the sense organs, the “lesser part” of oneself, which are the seat of our physical desires (6A15). Mengzi could have associated virtues with the proper functioning of each of these faculties, but I see no evidence at all that he (or his School of the Way followers) did so. Instead, the Mengzian virtues are grouped according to the aspects of human action and experience to which they correspond. I will now sketch how this correspondence works. I think I am being faithful to Mengzi’s general intuitions, but I should stress that I am doing historical retrieval here rather than historical exegesis. So I claim license to go beyond what Mengzi says explicitly.

Humans are beings that are social, distinct, expressive, and temporal. (1) In saying that humans are *social*, I mean that living well for humans involves, to at least some degree, participation in a community. Consequently, one sphere of human experience is assisting others. (2) Though humans are social, they are also *distinct* from one another. Ruists since Kongzi himself have acknowledged the commonsense intuition that, at some level, Yan Hui is not Zigong. In saying this, I do not assume anything like radical individualism. Part of a person’s distinction from others is provided by her standing in particular relationships with other people: part of *my* identity is that I am the son of CRVN, for example. So another sphere of human experience is having an identity as distinct from society. (3) The kind of sociality that humans have requires the *expression* and appreciation of meaning through symbols and beauty. In every human society we know of, and in every human society we can concretely imagine, people use gestures, expressions, body language, and objects (in addition to spoken language) in order to convey meaning and facilitate interactions of various kinds. (This is especially, although not exclusively, true in those interactions that distinguish people from others.) In addition, the kinds of interactions humans have can be done skilfully (hence beautifully) or clumsily (hence distastefully). Thus, one sphere of human experience is the production and appreciation of the beautiful.<sup>51</sup> (4) Finally,

<sup>51</sup> The film *Four Weddings and a Funeral* illustrates the British ritual of the best man giving a wedding speech that is intended to be witty, risqué, and to cast the groom in an unfavorable light. We see one character give a speech that achieves these goals skillfully and charmingly, whereas another character fails at the same task in a clumsy and embarrassing way. At one level, we *could* say that the second character fails to properly assist others (fails at benevolence) or that he violates the practices that allow people to maintain their individual identities and relationships (fails at righteousness). Perhaps more plausibly we *could* say that he fails to respond to the demands of the complex and fluid situation

humans live in a world that is temporal; it undergoes change. The results of this change are sometimes predictable. (I will almost certainly lose in *this* jiu-jitsu match, because I have lost every single other time.) But even predictable change can require great skill. We know (usually) whether the launch of a satellite into orbit will be successful, but the prediction of this requires immense intellectual talent and training. Other times, we cannot predict the results of change with certainty, so we must learn to think and act as best we can under conditions of uncertain change. (The *Yijing* seems tailor-made for advising us in such open-ended situations.) So one sphere of human experience is change and the difficulty of predicting the results of change.

Each of these four spheres of human activity and experience corresponds to one of the four Mengzian cardinal virtues:

Sphere of Experience	Virtue (Standard English Label and Chinese Name)	Virtue (Intuitive English Name)
Assisting Others	Benevolence (rén 仁)	Benevolence
Maintaining Distinction from Others	Righteousness (yì 義)	Integrity
Producing and Appreciating Beauty	Propriety (lǐ 禮)	Refinement
Change and Uncertainty	Wisdom (zhì 智)	Wisdom

As we begin to think about the Mengzian virtues in this broader way, the limitations of some of the standard English labels become especially evident, so I have supplied some alternative, intuitive English names for two of the virtues.

I would argue that there is, not a unity of these virtues, but an interdependence among them. One person may have benevolence to a greater degree than she has integrity, whereas in another person the opposite is the case. (This may have been true of Liu Xiaohui and Bo Yi, respectively [2A9, 5B1].) However, a deficiency in any one virtue limits the extent to which one can have the other virtues. To pick an extreme case, suppose we try to imagine someone who has a high degree of benevolence yet has only minimal wisdom. This person might have a disposition

that he faces (fails at wisdom). But this character knows what, generally speaking, is demanded of him in this situation, and he is properly motivated to achieve it. He simply is lacking in the *skill* to gracefully navigate this social situation. In other words, he is lacking in propriety. (This film also gives a very moving illustration of the use of poetry as part of a funeral ritual.)



to sympathize with the suffering of others and to act on this sympathy, but without wisdom this disposition will fail to reliably result in effective assistance. Simply put, as well-intentioned as one may be, how can he actually help anyone if he doesn't know how to do so (or even what would count as "helping in this situation")? If your partner repeatedly misses work because of a drinking problem, and you sympathize with her, what should you do? Cover up for her? Ignore the problem? Tell her she has to sober up or move out? The wise person either knows the answer, or at least knows that he doesn't know the answer and knows how to start finding out the answer.

It is perhaps tempting to say that, although the well-intentioned person would be more effective if he were also wise, he could still be deemed to be benevolent just on the basis of his sympathy and good intentions. But remember that virtues are excellences that enable one to lead a flourishing life. The sympathetic but foolish person has a disposition that, if it contributes to a flourishing life at all, does so only accidentally and sporadically. At this point, one might object that, realistically speaking, no one is merely sympathetic without any trace of wisdom. I think this is true, but it just goes to show the interrelationship of the virtues. Anything recognizable as sympathy *would* have to be accompanied by some degree of wisdom. To the extent that sympathy was part of the excellence of benevolence, to that extent it would incorporate wisdom, because without wisdom it could not contribute to living a flourishing life.<sup>52</sup>

So if we characterize them abstractly, we can recognize Mengzi's four cardinal virtues as characteristics that are necessary in any society. In addition, many aspects of Mengzi's specific characterizations of the virtues seem to me, at the very least, worth taking seriously. (1) Consider "benevolence": we humans *do* generally have a very strong disposition toward agent-relative concern for our family members, friends, and members of our communities. I do not think the Mohists present a good argument for overriding this disposition, and I think Thomas Nagel (among others) diagnoses what is generally wrong with such arguments.<sup>53</sup> (2) Regarding righteousness (or "integrity"): some have objected to a sense of shame as a motivation for virtuous action, but I agree with Isenberg and Williams that any properly functioning virtuous agent

<sup>52</sup> An alternative way to characterize a virtue would be as a disposition that is responsive to the ethical qualities of one's situation. It is also true on this conception that benevolence could not exist without wisdom, for without wisdom sympathy would not be properly responsive to the situation.

<sup>53</sup> Nagel, *View from Nowhere*, especially pp. 189–200.

would have a sense of shame.<sup>54</sup> Only a person who was completely indifferent to her own character would lack a sense of shame. (3) The parts of Mengzian “wisdom” are acknowledged to be virtues in the Western traditions as well. But I find it more intuitive to think of wisdom as a disposition that enables the proper functioning of the other virtues rather than being (as it is for Aristotelians) the master virtue itself. (4) In the next section of this chapter, I’ll discuss why ritual, as a set of *practices*, is so important for contemporary Western society. The virtue of propriety (or “refinement”) is closely related to these practices, and Joel Kupperman offers a very intuitive example of it:

Oscar and Bloggs both tell a host or hostess that they have enjoyed the party (this is a prosaic general description); but Oscar does so with some unexpected turns of phrase that others later describe as “charming” or “witty,” whereas Bloggs (exhibiting a style that is actually lack of style) says “I had a nice time” in a flat voice with utterly unaccented cadence. . . . The same thing (more or less) can be done affectionately or coldly, in a dignified or a slovenly way, with diffidence or in a way that smacks of arrogance.<sup>55</sup>

Kupperman draws our attention to the fact that, in real life, style matters to us. All else being equal, and assuming that this example is representative of Oscar and Bloggs, we want to be friends with Oscar more than with Bloggs; we want Oscar to come to the party and are less concerned about whether Bloggs shows up. Furthermore, we generally admire someone’s style much more if we think that it is authentic. If Oscar seems pleasant and likeable, but he is actually hateful and unpleasant, we dismiss his style as phony. Most Western philosophers have overlooked style, despite its obvious importance in our lived experience as social animals. Although there are exceptions (such as Nietzsche and the later Foucault), Ruists like Mengzi have a more robust and plausible conception of how style and refinement must fit in with other aspects of human life, such as benevolence and integrity.

### III.C. Human Flourishing

#### *III.C.1. Ritual*

We (and I now limit my discussion to the contemporary United States, since that is the non-Chinese culture I know best) have a society

<sup>54</sup> Isenberg, “Natural Pride and Natural Shame,” and Williams, *Shame and Necessity*, especially pp. 75–102.

<sup>55</sup> Kupperman, “Naturalness Revisited,” p. 47.

increasingly marked by fragmentation and a lack of civility. These are the sort of problems that ritual, at its best, can help address. A well-functioning communal ritual gives people a sense of belonging to a larger group. This both expresses and reinforces a commitment to working for the well-being of the group, and to dealing with disagreement and conflict in a peaceful and respectful way.

But precisely because we are a pluralistic and comparatively ritual-poor society, the preservation and development of rituals presents special problems. In order for a ritual to function, a significant number of people must participate in it and must feel about it in the right way. If one creates a new ritual *ex nihilo* or even revives a long-ignored ritual, it will frequently fail to achieve these two conditions. In addition, rituals that are successful for certain groups may become divisive in other ways. If we allow school-sponsored prayer, it will alienate and offend one portion of the population. But if we disallow it, we alienate and offend another portion. One alternative is to aim to produce rituals for self-selected groups, leaving participation voluntary. Thus, Christians celebrate Christmas, Jews celebrate Hannukah, and some African-Americans celebrate Kwanzaa. The problem is that, by its very nature, this approach fails to develop rituals that link diverse groups together. Generally speaking, the more a ritual is, in Geertz's formulation, a model for and a model of, the more effective it will be in shaping behavior. But, to the same extent, the ritual will express values that will offend or at least exclude some segment of the population.

It is tempting to dismiss the problem as intractable and conclude that rituals must always be of limited (and perhaps ever-lessening) significance in a society such as our own. However, I submit that one of the most significant problems in our society is a feeling of alienation. Humans need to feel "at home" in their communities. The failure to feel "at home" makes it difficult for people to sustain their commitments to social participation and to acting for the good of others. But I do not have a principled solution to the problem of how to reconcile rituals with pluralism. The most we can do is to recognize the power of rituals, judge them on a case-by-case basis, always keeping an eye on how rituals include or fail to include others, and work for their creation and preservation when we feel it will be beneficial.

### *III.C.2. Living Well*

Let's review. A fairly limited number of candidates for "the good life" have been proposed. Aristotle dismissed as candidates for human flourishing

the lives dedicated to wealth, physical pleasure, and social prestige. Instead, he considers as serious candidates the “practical life” of virtuous activity with others aimed at the good of the community and the “theoretical life” of research and contemplation of general truths. Aquinas agrees with Aristotle in rejecting wealth, physical pleasure, and social prestige, and he adds arguments against fame and bodily health. He takes seriously the two candidates that Aristotle considers, but ultimately he argues that the human good can be found only in the beatific vision of God.

One of the values of studying Chinese philosophy is that it can offer us alternative conceptions of flourishing ways of life. Ruists certainly agree that the life of practical activity aimed at the good of the community is worthwhile. However, there is nothing corresponding to the beatific vision in the Ruist conception of living well. Furthermore, for Ruists, theoretical understanding is a means to achieving other goods rather than an ultimate goal.

Another important area of disagreement between Ruists and Aristotelians is over artistic production and appreciation. Artistic production has been deemphasized by those in the Aristotelian tradition. Aristotle classified painting, sculpting, and musical performance as *poiêsis*, “production.” In *Nicomachean Ethics* Book VI, Chapter 4, Aristotle distinguishes *poiêsis* from *praxis*, “production” from “action.” “Production” is an activity that is instrumental to something distinct from itself, whereas “action” is a constitutive means. So manufacturing a wrench or sculpting a statue is mere “production,” since it is valuable only as a means to *producing* some distinct good, whereas moving a piece on the chessboard is partially constitutive of the *action* of playing chess. Consequently, on Aristotle’s view it follows almost by definition that producing works of art cannot be part of living well. This fails to capture, though, the intuition we now have that activities like painting and writing poetry are valuable.

In contrast, Ruists have had great respect for artistic production, particularly in calligraphy, painting, music, and poetic composition.<sup>56</sup> In later Ruism this often merges with a “Daoist” reverence for the ethical value of skillful activity. One of the most famous stories in the *Zhuangzi* is about Butcher Ding, whose skillful dismembering of an ox carcass amazes a ruler. When questioned, Ding explains that he does not rely on “skill” but instead follows the Way. Through years of intensive practice, Ding has learned to stop seeing with his eyes and to intuitively follow the natural

<sup>56</sup> The Romantic tradition in the West has also stressed the appreciation and production of painting, sculpture, music, poetry, and other imaginative literature.

structure of the ox's body as he carves.<sup>57</sup> This kind of practice is remarkably effective. But Zhuangzi seems to hold it up as an instance of a kind of activity that is valuable in itself and not just for its effects. This became one of the inspirations for the Zen Buddhist ideal of skillful activity as overcoming the false dichotomy between self and the rest of the world. Hence, archery, calligraphy, the martial arts, painting, swordsmanship, and flower arrangement all became activities that could potentially be stimuli to and manifestations of enlightenment. The character Lin Daiyu in *Dream of the Red Chamber* expresses this view in regard to playing the *Qin* (a sort of zither):

I realized that playing the *Qin* is a form of meditation and spiritual discipline handed down to us from the ancients.<sup>58</sup> . . . The essence of the *Qin* is restraint. It was created in ancient times to help man purify himself and lead a gentle and sober life, to quell all wayward passions and to curb every riotous impulse. . . . [When you play, your] Soul may now commune with the Divine, and enter into that mysterious Union with the Way.<sup>59</sup>

If we find something plausible in the meditative view of artistic activity (which I do, at least), then we can broaden our list of flourishing lives to include those of the painter, jazz musician, and actor.<sup>60</sup>

But from the beginning, Ruists have valued not only artistic performance, but also artistic products. Commenting on a particular performance of a piece of classical music, Kongzi sighed, "I never imagined that music could be so sublime" (7.14). In general, Ruists believe that artistic appreciation has a morally edifying effect. Fine works of art "teach" our emotions. Thus, Kongzi observed of a particular ode that it "expresses joy without becoming licentious, and expresses sorrow without falling into excessive pathos" (3.20).

Of course, the notion that appreciating works of art has ethical value is not unheard of in the West. Aristotle connects tragedy to the training of the emotions through the concept of catharsis. And in *Principia Ethica* G. E. Moore singles out a person appreciating a work of beauty as one

<sup>57</sup> Zhuangzi 3, "The Key to Nourishing Life," *Readings*, pp. 224–25.

<sup>58</sup> Cao, *Story of the Stone*, vol. 4, p. 152 (Chapter 86).

<sup>59</sup> Cao, *Story of the Stone*, vol. 4, p. 154 (Chapter 86).

<sup>60</sup> Keep in mind that, for a Mengzian, the exercise of skill should be in the context of a life that also manifests benevolence and righteousness. Consequently, the actor who skillfully portrays a humanitarian character, but is cruel off the stage, is leading a bad life by Mengzian standards. (Can Mengzi provide a compelling explanation of *why* such a skilled but cruel actor should cultivate benevolence? Can *any* virtue ethical account do so? This is a challenging question that I hope to turn to in a later work.)

of the “organic wholes” that has significant intrinsic goodness. The Ruist aesthetic is distinctive in two ways, though. Ruists see the contemplation of a wide range of beautiful things as having intrinsic value: dramatic works, poetry, painting, calligraphy, music, and sculpture. And in each case, Ruists think that such contemplation, when properly done on a genuinely beautiful work, is not only intrinsically valuable but can also have an ethically edifying effect.

Perhaps most distinctive of Ruism, though, is the view that there is great ethical value simply in life with one’s family and friends. Passing the time of day with one’s friends, playing with one’s children, going on a picnic with one’s partner, attending a religious service with one’s family and then having a leisurely brunch – for Plato or Aristotle these are only means to some higher goal. But why should they not be *the* goal? Or, at the very least, why should social activities like these not be an indispensable *part* of living well? This is not, I think, a trivial point. I have often asked colleagues, including ones who were friendly to virtue ethics, to tell me what aspects of their lives they think give their lives meaning. They typically mention their research, the distinctive satisfaction of writing books and articles, and the joy of an intelligent philosophical discussion. A few will add, “Oh yes, and teaching students too.” I follow up by asking something like, “What role do your partner and children have in your life?” They are often taken off guard by this question. Because we have been raised to think in Aristotelian terms, the life of the mind has assumed an almost hegemonic role in our conception of human flourishing. I think we should take seriously the possibility that a person with limited intellectual interests but a healthy and happy family life might just be living as well as a lonely but successful academic. (And, of course, someone who successfully integrated the two kinds of good would be living better than either.)<sup>61</sup>

The following passage (probably fabricated long after the time of Kongzi, unfortunately) suggests the Ruist conception of human flourishing that I personally find most attractive and inspiring.<sup>62</sup> Consequently, I

<sup>61</sup> The “ethics of care” of Nel Noddings, Carol Gilligan, and others has also emphasized the ethical importance of loving human relationships. The similarities and differences between this position and Ruist virtue ethics are explored by Chenyang Li in “Jen and the Feminist Ethics of Care.”

<sup>62</sup> I think that Steven Van Zoeren is correct in suggesting that the earliest sections of the *Analects* “are characterized by sayings with no narrative context at all or relatively simple contexts,” whereas in later passages “we find narratives of complexity and sophistication” (*Poetry and Personality*, p. 23). This passage, *Analects* 11.26, seems to be one of those

find it a fitting passage with which to end our exploration of virtue ethics in early Chinese thought:

Zilu, Zengxi, Ran You, and Zihua were seated in attendance. The Master said to them, "I am older than any of you, but do not feel reluctant to speak your minds on that account. You are all in the habit of complaining, 'I am not appreciated.' Well, if someone *were* to appreciate your talents and give you employment, how would you then go about things?"

Zilu spoke up immediately, "If I were given charge of a state that could field a thousand chariots – even one hemmed in between powerful states, suffering from armed invasions, and afflicted by famine – before three years were up I could infuse it with courage and a sense of what is right."

The Master smiled at him, and then turned to Ran You. "Ran You," he said, "what would you do?"

Ran You answered, "If I were given charge of a state sixty or seventy – or a least fifty or sixty – square leagues in area, before three years were up I would see that it was materially prosperous. As for instructing the people in ritual practice and music, this is a task that would have to await the arrival of a gentleman."

The Master then turned to Zihua. "Zihua, what would you do?"

Zihua answered, "It is not that I am saying that I would actually be able to do so, but my wish, at least, would be to devote myself to study. I would like, perhaps, to serve as a minor functionary – properly clad in ceremonial cap and gown – in charge of ancestral temple events or diplomatic gatherings."

The Master then turned to Zengxi. "Zengxi, what would you do?"

Zengxi stopped strumming upon the zither, and as the last notes faded away he set the instrument aside and rose to his feet. "I would choose to do something quite different from any of the other three."

"What harm is there in that?" the Master said. "Each of you is merely expressing your own aspirations."

Zengxi then said, "In the third month of spring, once the spring garments have been completed, I should like to assemble a company of five or six young men and six or seven boys to go bathe in the Yi River and enjoy the breeze upon the Rain Altar, and then return singing to the Master's house."

The Master sighed deeply, saying, "I am with Zengxi!"

Me too.

passages that shows great narrative sophistication (*ibid.*, pp. 60–63). It is clearly, though, a tremendously interesting passage, which is worth at least an article or book chapter on its own. Here I cite only half of it to illustrate the Ruist conception of human flourishing.





# Appendix

## Some Alternative Views

### I. MORE ON TRUTH

#### I.A. The Problem in Brief

Chad Hansen presents what he takes to be *the* Indo-European view on truth, belief, and proof:

The model of knowing was representing accurately through mental contents – true beliefs. The mental items arrange themselves into beliefs – mental compositions or sentences of *mentalese*. These mental constructions (thoughts) picture possible physical configurations of objects. Beliefs are true if the pictures are accurate, false if they are not.<sup>1</sup>

Syllogistic logic and the proof model of reasoning bolster this mental semantic theory. . . . Truth is the semantic value of sentences and therefore of beliefs.<sup>2</sup>

This cluster of concepts in semantics, logic, psychology, and moral theory work together. These are not random, isolated notions, but part of the central conceptual structure of both Western and Indian philosophy. . . . To attribute one of these ideas to a philosophical culture is to attribute the *network* of ideas to them.<sup>3</sup>

This contrasts sharply with the early Chinese view of language, in which we find an

absence of compositional units corresponding to sentences. Chinese thinkers did not distinguish sentential units as an intermediate structure [between words and a “guiding discourse”]. Thus they did not focus on truth conditions. Similarly, their philosophy of mind did not include the theory

<sup>1</sup> Hansen, *Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Hansen, *Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> Hansen, *Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, p. 18. Emphasis in original.

of beliefs (sentences in mentalese). And their moral theory did not focus on rules (universal prescriptive sentences).<sup>4</sup>

David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames seem to arrive at a similar conclusion. They hold that ancient Chinese philosophy has “a disinterest in the cultural requisites that underlie classical theories of truth,”<sup>5</sup> namely, “(1) the existence of a single-ordered world, and (2) a distinction between reality and appearance.”<sup>6</sup> They argue that these assumptions are made by the vast majority of Western philosophers but are absent from the Chinese tradition. One consequence of this “disinterest” in truth is the “absence of concern with strictly rational modes of argumentation” in China.<sup>7</sup>

It seems that if Hansen and Hall and Ames are correct, then my project in this book must be fundamentally wrong-headed. For I have taken Chinese thinkers to be providing rational arguments for the truth of the claims that they advance. However, it is possible that the appearance of a fundamental disagreement is specious. In order to see whether this is so, we must get clearer about what is at stake.

There are five major theories of truth: correspondence, coherence, pragmatic, redundancy, and semantic.<sup>8</sup> All these theories agree on the following biconditional: “S” is true if and only if S. For example, the sentence “There are ghosts and spirits” is true if and only if there are ghosts and spirits. (Western philosophers will recognize that this is simply Alfred Tarski’s truth schema.) This biconditional can serve as a thin characterization of what it is for a sentence to be true. Consequently, it can be accepted by those who do not link the notion of truth to psychological or semantic considerations in the manner that Hansen describes. Similarly, this thin conception of truth can be accepted by those who do not share the metaphysical assumptions that Hall and Ames identify. Chinese philosophers can be said to have a conception of truth if they have something that matches this thin conception (even if the particular thick way that they cash it out is different).

What is meant by a “correspondence theory of truth”? There is a degree of ambiguity in this expression. Sometimes people mean by a correspondence theory simply any theory that satisfies Tarski’s biconditional. Other times, “correspondence theory” is used to describe a robust and detailed

<sup>4</sup> Hansen, *Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, p. 4, note.

<sup>5</sup> Hall and Ames, *Thinking from the Han*, pp. 145–46.

<sup>6</sup> Hall and Ames, *Thinking from the Han*, p. 122.

<sup>7</sup> Hall and Ames, *Thinking from the Han*, p. 131.

<sup>8</sup> For a survey, see Walker, “Theories of Truth.”

account of the ways in which words in a sentence and the relations they have to one another mirror entities in the world and the relations that those entities have to one another. Bertrand Russell's account in *The Problems of Philosophy* is a paradigm of such a robust correspondence theory. Russell states that Othello believes that Desdemona loves Cassio just in case Othello stands in the relation of believing to the ordered triplet of Desdemona, the relation of loving, and Cassio. Othello's belief is true just in case Desdemona and Cassio *are* related in the relation of loving (in that order) and false otherwise.<sup>9</sup> If what Hansen or Hall and Ames mean by "truth" or the "correspondence theory of truth" is something like a robust correspondence theory à la Russell, then I agree that no one in ancient China had such a theory.

However, it would be a non sequitur to infer from the absence of an early Chinese concern with robust correspondence theories of truth to the conclusion that Chinese thinkers were unconcerned with truth, simpliciter, or did not present rational arguments, or did not argue in favor of or against certain beliefs. This is so for two reasons. First, there are a variety of other theories of truth besides correspondence. Advocates of coherence, pragmatic, redundancy, and semantic theories of truth agree that something (sentences, uses of sentences, beliefs or propositions) can be true or false. Each also agrees that there are logical relations (such as deductive entailment) among these things. These theories will account for belief-contexts in different ways, but each is consistent with attributing beliefs (that are true or false) to people. And none of these theories denies that there is a distinction between "good" and "bad" arguments. Second, one does not need to have any *theory of truth* in order to be concerned with truth, belief, and argumentation. If you tell me that the capital of California is Los Angeles, I don't need to have read Tarski or Russell to meaningfully say, "That's not true," or simply "No, it's not." Furthermore, in order to argue for my claim by saying, "The capital is where the statehouse is, and the statehouse is in Sacramento, not Los Angeles," I don't need to be able to reconstruct what I have said as a syllogism in sentential logic.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, *nothing that I have said in this book requires attributing a robust correspondence theory of truth or the discovery of formal logic to Kongzi, the early Mohists, or Mengzi.*

<sup>9</sup>Russell, *Problems of Philosophy*, pp. 119–30.

<sup>10</sup>Peirce ("How to Make Our Ideas Clear") and Putnam (*Reason, Truth and History*) are two examples of philosophers who see no tension between rejecting robust correspondence theories of truth and continuing to value truth, clarity, and rational argumentation.

My interlocutors *might* be comfortable with this conclusion. Hansen states that the Western “semantic tradition deals in truth,” and the Chinese “pragmatic one in appropriateness or acceptability of utterances.”<sup>11</sup> As a result of this difference, Chinese thinkers have no interest in “the Euclidean model of proof, as sequences of sentences arranged so the conclusion inherits truth from the premises.”<sup>12</sup> However, Hansen acknowledges that pragmatic “Assertability is not independent of the way the world is.”<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Hall and Ames write that “Questions of truth and falsity in the strict sense depend upon notions of the *necessity* of the conclusions of arguments.”<sup>14</sup> However, a lack of interest “in the strict sense” of truth “does not mean that the Chinese do not speak and write in ways that presume the facticity of assertions.”<sup>15</sup> What it does mean is that their “arguments are, strictly speaking, ‘groundless.’ . . . Neither a ‘final principle’ nor ‘atomic facts’ are discoverable at the end of the arguments.”<sup>16</sup> So Hansen and Hall and Ames have said much with which I can agree. We all agree with A. C. Graham that formal logic was never discovered in China. In addition, I would agree (both as a description of ancient Chinese thought and as a description of how philosophy ought to be conducted in general) that there are no absolutely certain foundations and that definitive and timeless “proof” is a mirage. (My repeated invocations of Kuhn, Quine, and others have been in support of this point.)

I would be happy to end on this irenic note. However, I fear that substantive disagreements may remain.

Contrary to what I argue in Chapter 3, §III, Hansen claims that the Mohists’ three “gauges” are not tests of the truth of any doctrine (such as the doctrine that ghosts and spirits exist, that they punish the wicked, and that they reward the good). “These standards,” he claims, “are implausible on their face as applied to sentences, theories, or beliefs. As tests of truth, the three standards fail miserably.”<sup>17</sup> Instead, the issue that concerns Mozi is whether “putting *exists* before *spirits*” in our linguistic practice would have better consequences than adopting the practice of saying “there are no spirits.”<sup>18</sup> Hansen writes that the Mohist “theory”

<sup>11</sup> Hansen, *Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, pp. 139–40.

<sup>12</sup> Hansen, *Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, p. 238.

<sup>13</sup> Hansen, *Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, p. 392n79.

<sup>14</sup> Hall and Ames, *Thinking from the Han*, p. 132. Emphasis in original.

<sup>15</sup> Hall and Ames, *Thinking from the Han*, p. 135.

<sup>16</sup> Hall and Ames, *Thinking from the Han*, p. 134.

<sup>17</sup> Hansen, *Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, p. 147.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Hansen, *Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, p. 146.

[sic] of the three gauges “forcefully illustrates the difference between the Western truth-based scheme and the Chinese pragmatic one.”<sup>19</sup> Hansen complains that the Mohist discussion on the topic of ghosts and spirits is typically mistranslated: “The absence of explicit belief language . . . does not bother translators because they regard the theory of beliefs and other mental objects to be obvious and inescapable.”<sup>20</sup> We will, Hansen says, “ask whether Mozi *really* believed in spirits” only if “we mistakenly attribute propositional concepts to Mozi here.”<sup>21</sup> Hansen challenges “advocates of the traditional view to produce *an argument* for attributing truth and belief concerns to Chinese philosophers in the face of [the] absence of those terms and their consistent use of exclusively pragmatic behaviorist language.”<sup>22</sup> (I assume that what Hansen means by “those terms” is terms that deal with truth and belief.)

It is less clear that I have a fundamental disagreement with Hall and Ames. However, when they question the value of “rational engagement” with the Ruist tradition, or when they suggest that “to be useful in cultural conversation, language must remain productively vague,” it seems that I do.<sup>23</sup> I suspect that part of what is at issue here is the classic disagreement between postmodernists and those in the hermeneutic tradition. These two groups agree in rejecting many aspects of the modernist tradition that grows out of the Enlightenment. However, those in the hermeneutic tradition do not think that this entails rejecting a commitment to the ideals of clarity and rationality as these are achieved through ongoing dialogue.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, I shall explain why I disagree with what I take Hansen and Hall and Ames to be claiming about truth.

The two metaphysical assumptions that Hall and Ames identify as underlying what they take to be the distinctive Western view of truth are inadequate to distinguish all (or even the great majority) of Western philosophers from Chinese philosophers. (1) It is not entirely clear what Hall and Ames mean by a “single-ordered world.” My suspicion is that they are conflating three separate notions: (a) objectivism (as opposed to relativism), (b) generalism (as opposed to particularism), and (c) monism (as opposed to pluralism). (a) An objectivist (also called a “realist”) believes that there is a way the world is that is independent of the opinions or perspectives of those who observe or inhabit the world.

<sup>19</sup> Hansen, *Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, p. 144.

<sup>20</sup> Hansen, *Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, p. 144.

<sup>21</sup> Hansen, *Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, p. 146. Emphasis in original.

<sup>22</sup> Hansen, *Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, p. 394n86. Emphasis in original.

<sup>23</sup> Hall and Ames, *Thinking from the Han*, pp. xiv, xv.

<sup>24</sup> See note 4 of my Chapter 5.

A relativist, in contrast, believes that at least some facts or claims are dependent on an individual or cultural perspective. If belief in a “single-ordered” world is a belief in objectivism, then I would say that there are at least as many, if not more, advocates of this view in the early Chinese tradition as there are in the West. Ruism is, in my view, highly objectivistic. Hall and Ames disagree with my assessment of Ruism, but they cannot deny that we find many major philosophers advocating relativism in the Western tradition. Protagoras was famous for saying “Humans are the measure of all things,” which can be interpreted as a statement of relativism. Among more recent Anglo-American philosophers, ethical relativism is one of the major, perhaps the dominant, meta-ethical position, having been defended by Gilbert Harman, among others. Consequently, if a commitment to a single-ordered world is a commitment to objectivism, then we cannot say that it is a prerequisite for a concern with truth in the West.

(b) As we saw in Chapter 1, a particularist believes that ethical truth cannot be fully captured in substantive, exceptionless ethical rules. Ruists are, I think, often particularists. However, so are Aristotelians and neo-Aristotelians. Aristotelians are paradigmatic Western philosophers who are concerned with truth. Consequently, one cannot defend the claim that the denial of particularism is a “cultural requisite” for a concern with truth.

(c) A monist holds that there is one way of life that is supremely valuable. There may be other ways of life that also have some value, but one way of life is clearly superior. I think that this is the view that classical Aristotelians hold. I also believe that Ruists are monists in this sense. Again, Hall and Ames will disagree, but even if they were right about Ruists being pluralists about ways of life, they are wrong in thinking that pluralism is uncharacteristic of the West. Indeed, one of the main points of Kant and those who follow him is that there are many ways of life possessed of value. According to Kantians, so long as one does not interfere in the freedom of others and respects both oneself and others as free agents, one may live as one chooses. So whether Hall and Ames mean objectivism, generalism, or ethical monism by “single-ordered world,” this is not a commitment that distinguishes Ruists from Western philosophers.

(2) The reality/appearance contrast is, depending on what one means by it, either something that most Western philosophers have denied or it is something that most Chinese philosophers accept. If one means by it something like the view that one finds in Plato, that the things of this world are pale, less-real copies of an eternal, unchanging reality, then

most Western philosophers have denied this. If one means something less metaphysically loaded, like the claim that sometimes things are not as they seem, then Chinese thinkers have also held this view. For example, Mengzi says that it seems like it is the nature of Ox Mountain to be barren, but that is not its genuine nature (6A8).

I now turn to Hansen's arguments.<sup>25</sup> In the next section, I shall attempt to show that the Mohists were concerned with whether ghosts and fate exist, that they advocated certain beliefs, and that they discussed issues of truth and falsity. In the section after that, I shall try to show that Hansen's own account of the Mohists' three "gauges" is highly problematic.

### I.B. Existence, Truth, and Belief

Hansen's general account raises three major questions:

(1)

Did the Mohists discuss any ontological issues, or did they discuss only pragmatic issues? In other words, did the Mohists discuss whether there really are ghosts and fate, or did they discuss only the consequences of adopting linguistic schemes in which one says things such as 〈有鬼神〉, "There are ghosts and spirits," and 〈有命〉, "There is fate"?

(2)

Did the Mohists discuss belief? For example, did they advocate certain beliefs and discourage other beliefs?

(3)

Did the Mohists discuss whether anything is "true" or "false," per se?

#### I.B.1. *Did the Mohists Care whether Ghosts Exist?*

It might be taken as support for Hansen's interpretation that the Mohists sometimes engage in semantic ascent in discussing the positions of those whom they criticize, or in presenting their own position.<sup>26</sup> For example, in "On Ghosts," the Mohists once write, 今執無鬼者之言曰, "Now, those who support the saying, 'There are no ghosts' say . . ." <sup>27</sup> In addition, in

<sup>25</sup> My critique of Hansen is quite similar to that of Harbsmeier ("Marginalia Sino-logica"). However, my experience has been that most people are not familiar with Harbsmeier's work on this issue, so I feel that it is worth returning to the topic. (The only comments by Hansen on Harbsmeier that I am aware of are in *Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, p. 48, note, and pp. 378–79n8.)

<sup>26</sup> I am indebted to Stephen Angle for raising this issue (in conversation). Recall (from our discussion of "correcting names" in Chapter 2, §I.B.2) that semantic ascent "is the shift from talking in certain terms to talking about them" (Quine, *Word and Object*, p. 271).

<sup>27</sup> They also thrice write, 今執無鬼者曰, and twice write, 今執無鬼者言曰. I am inclined to think that the latter two constructions are not examples of semantic ascent, but the

the three versions of “A Condemnation of Fatalism,” the Mohists seven times (altogether) use the expression, 執有命者之言, “Those who support the saying, ‘There is fate,’ . . . .”<sup>28</sup> If, whenever it came to what *we* would describe as the issue of whether there *is* fate or *are* ghosts, the Mohists consistently (or almost always) used convoluted locutions like these, we might suspect that the issue *for them* was more about what to *say* than about what is actually *true*.

However, the Mohists do not consistently engage in semantic ascent; in fact, they very often make what *appear* to be first-order declarative sentences.<sup>29</sup> Consider the following claims, explicitly attributed to Mozi himself:

古之今之爲鬼。非他也。有天鬼。亦有山水鬼神者。亦有人死而爲鬼者。The ghosts of the past and of the present are not different. There are Heavenly ghosts, there are ghosts and spirits of the mountains and waters, and there are also people who die and become ghosts.<sup>30</sup>

...

Now, when I perform sacrifices, it is not the case that I simply pour them into a ditch and throw them away. Above, I seek the blessing of the ghosts. Below, I gather the people together, making acquaintance with my fellow villagers. If there are spirits, then I succeed in feeding [the spirits of my deceased] father, mother, and siblings. Is this not an activity that benefits the world?!<sup>31</sup>

Even if we agree that the Mohists never discussed truth as a property of propositions or belief as a propositional attitude, the sentences above would still *seem to be* what grammarians call declarative statements. If they are declarative, then part of what is at issue for Mozi must be whether or not there *are* ghosts.

### I.B.2. Did the Mohists Discuss Beliefs?

Turning to the second issue, we note that there are constructions in Classical Chinese that *seem to* attribute beliefs. For instance, in “On Ghosts”

point may be arguable. For instance, one might conceivably argue that the expression “執 P” is shorthand for “執 the saying of ‘P.’” Interestingly, in all the examples I have seen, the Mohists use the “執 P” construction to refer only to *their opponents’* positions.

<sup>28</sup> An additional nine times they use expressions that include 執有命, or 執有命者, and once use the expression, 執有命者言曰. I am inclined to think that these constructions are not examples of semantic ascent, but the point may be arguable. (See my previous note.)

<sup>29</sup> Or what an Austinean might call “constative utterances,” or statements with significant “locutionary force” (*How to Do Things with Words*, p. 6n2).

<sup>30</sup> Mozi 31, “On Ghosts” (HY 31/53/96–97). Cf. Watson, *Mo Tzu*, p. 107.

<sup>31</sup> Mozi, 31 “On Ghosts.” Cf. Watson, *Mo Tzu*, p. 109.



we find *six* occurrences of the expression, 鬼神之有豈可疑哉, “How can one doubt that there are ghosts and spirits?!”<sup>32</sup> In addition, they use the common construction 以 N 爲 P, “to believe that N is P,” or (more literally) “to take N as (being) P.” This very construction is used in “On Ghosts”: 請惑聞之見之, 則必以爲有, “If there really are people who have heard and seen something, then you must accept that such things exist”<sup>33</sup> and 故武王必以鬼神爲有, “King Wu must have believed in the existence of ghosts and spirits.”<sup>34</sup> We also find it in “A Condemnation of Fatalism”: 然而今天下之士君子或以命爲有, “Nonetheless, the scholars and gentlemen of the world today sometimes take fate to exist.”<sup>35</sup>

Here we do not have the construction common to (for example) Classical Greek and contemporary English, “N believe(s) (that) S,” in which a belief verb takes a (typically nominalized) sentence as its object: “I believe (that) there are ghosts.” However, it is not clear why the Chinese construction cannot express belief in another manner. If I were to say in English, “I take ghosts to be very dangerous,” would we say that I do not really believe that ghosts are dangerous, because there is no embedded sentence in my utterance?

Hansen does have a response to this concern. It relies on an unusual interpretation of the “以 N 爲 P” construction. He writes that to “*wei* [爲] is to assign something to a name-category in guiding action.”<sup>36</sup> Here is one case where I must agree with Hansen that there is such a thing as “the received view” and that Hansen is challenging it. If Hansen is right, almost every commentator over the last 2,000 or so years is wrong about the meaning of a basic construction in Classical Chinese. It is possible that this is true, of course. But we will expect some strong evidence from Hansen. I was able to find two arguments for this interpretation in Hansen’s *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*. He writes that, where we Indo-Europeans

would say that Ronnie believes the table is blue, classical Chinese says Ronnie *blues* the table or *yi*<sup>with regard to</sup> the table, *wei*<sup>deems/makes</sup> it blue.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Literally, “Ghosts-and-spirits’ existing: how could one doubt?!” Note that the object of the intentional verb (“doubts”) is a nominalized sentence: “ghosts-and-spirits’ existing.”

<sup>33</sup> *Mozi* 31, “On Ghosts,” *Readings*, p. 95 (HY 49/31/11). (Ammending 請惑 to 情或. Cf. Sun, *Mozi jiangou*, p. 202.)

<sup>34</sup> *Mozi* 31, “On Ghosts,” *Readings*, p. 100 (HY 51/31/47–48).

<sup>35</sup> *Mozi* 35, “A Condemnation of Fatalism” (HY 57/35/10 and 57/35/12).

<sup>36</sup> Hansen, *Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, p. 213.

<sup>37</sup> Hansen, *Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, p. 142. Emphasis and superscripts in original.

The preceding seems accurate to me. But Hansen immediately goes on to say the following:

That is, Ronnie is likely to apply the term *blue* to the table. He is both disposed to discriminate between blue and green in such and such a way and to use the term *blue* of things on the right side of the dividing line.<sup>38</sup>

This second quotation is ambiguous between two readings. (1) If what Hansen means is that among the consequences of regarding [以] the table as [爲] blue is that one will have certain behavioral and linguistic dispositions, then Hansen's claim is noncontroversially true. But notice that the same consequences follow if Ronnie *believes* that the table is blue. So, on this first interpretation of what Hansen says, he has provided no argument for his conclusion regarding the absence of belief attribution in Classical Chinese. (2) However, given the conclusions that he draws elsewhere in the book, Hansen seems to mean by the second quotation above that Ronnie has certain behavioral and linguistic dispositions *as opposed to* believing that the table is blue. Now, Hansen is entitled to *assert* this if he wishes, but the use of the phrase "that is" in the preceding quotation suggests that Hansen thinks he has drawn some sort of logical consequence from his earlier statements. And if that is what is going on, then Hansen's argument is the following: because in Classical Chinese one uses the locution "以 N 爲 P" as opposed to "He believes that N is P," therefore Classical Chinese does not have a locution that attributes belief to a person. But this is obviously question-begging, because the issue is just whether "以 N 爲 P" attributes belief to a person.

The only other thing like an argument for Hansen's interpretation of *wei* was tucked away in his discussion of Laozi, where he notes that, for us speakers of English, the "striking thing about the character *wei* is the apparent complexity of the role it plays in classical Chinese." We translate it as "to *deem to be* or *regard as*," but also as "to *act*, to *make*, or to *do*." However,

Laozi did not use English equivalents when he theorized about *wei*. In particular, he did not have one English equivalent in mind for one use and a different English word for another use. He saw a single term and what would have seemed like a unified concept. To *wei* is to assign something to a name-category in guiding action.<sup>39</sup>

This could be interpreted as presenting the following argument. (1) There is no evidence that early Chinese thinkers (of whom Laozi

<sup>38</sup> Hansen, *Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, p. 142. Emphasis in original.

<sup>39</sup> Hansen, *Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, p. 213.

is representative) distinguished between “wei” in what we would describe as the sense of “to make” and what we would describe as the sense of “to deem.” (2) Consequently, there is no warrant for attributing to them two different concepts that correspond to the one term “wei.” (3) Consequently, there is no warrant for attributing to them more than one distinct use of the term “wei.” (4) Since we all agree that one sense of “wei” in early Chinese texts is “to act” (which is a behavioral notion), this is the single use we should attribute to “wei.” (5) Consequently, the use we should attribute to “wei” in the “以 N 爲 P” construction is a behavioral use, specifically “to take N and treat it as P” (e.g., to discriminate between P and not-P things in such a way that N is P, and to use the term “P” of N).

There is a problem already with premise (1). Those who, like me, accept the “received view” on this topic think that the 爲 in the “以 N 爲 P” construction is the 爲 that is an equational verb.<sup>40</sup> In order to make his case, Hansen must, I think, deny that there is such a use of 爲. However, I do not see how Hansen can claim that “wei” is being used in the one univocal sense he thinks it has (“to make”) in contexts like the following:

爾爲爾。我爲我。You are you, and I am I. (*Mengzi* 2A9, 5B1)

子爲誰。Who are you? (*Analects* 18.6)

I find it implausible to read “wei” in these contexts as having anything other than its equational use. But that is essentially its use (according to “the received view”) in the “以 N 爲 P” construction: “to regard N as (being) P.”

Furthermore, and this is really problematic for Hansen’s univocal reading, there is a syntactic difference between the use of “wei” in the sense of “to make” and “wei” in the sense of “is.” Notice that in *Analects* 18.6 (just cited) the interrogative particle follows “wei.” But when “wei” is used in the sense of “to make,” the interrogative particle must precede the verb (as is the rule with all transitive verbs).<sup>41</sup> Thus we have *Analects* 2.19: 何爲則民服, “What must one *do*, so that the people will submit?” Finally, even if we granted (1) and (2), (3) certainly does not follow from them. It is quite possible to attribute to someone a distinction that she herself is unaware of making.<sup>42</sup> (Anecdotally, I recall complete incomprehension in first grade when my teacher tried to make me hear the difference

<sup>40</sup> Pulleyblank, *Outline of Classical Chinese Grammar*, p. 49.

<sup>41</sup> Pulleyblank, *Outline of Classical Chinese Grammar*, p. 20.

<sup>42</sup> This is the basis of the distinction between “emic” and “etic” analyses in linguistics and anthropology.

between the sound represented by “f” in “finger” and the sound represented by “th” in “thumb.” Yet I made the distinction in speech just as well both before and after I eventually could hear the difference.)

I have had to do a lot of extrapolating and interpolating, because I find Hansen’s comments on this topic quite compressed. So I may have misinterpreted him. However, I simply cannot find any other arguments for this surprising claim which is central to his argument.

### *I.B.3. Did the Mohists Discuss “Truth” Per Se?*

In answering this question, we should keep in mind our thin characterization of truth. The Mohists will have a thin conception of “truth” just in case they have a concept that adequately corresponds to “true” in the following schema: “S” is true if and only if S. Do they have such a notion? You bet! The relevant term in the Mohists’ Chinese is *not* frequently used in this sense. We owe a debt to Donald Munro (Hansen’s teacher) for suggesting that discussions of truth, per se, are not central to Chinese philosophy in the way that they are in Western accounts. However, the Mohists do have a term that they sometimes use for truth: rán 然. In their condemnation of elaborate musical performances, the Mohists write,

Now if men of rank and gentlemen in the world today *believe that what I say is not true* [以吾言不然], let us try enumerating the allotted tasks that are pursued throughout the world in order to see the harm done by musical performances.<sup>43</sup>

In the discussion of fate, one of the sets of chapters that Hansen is at pains to show is *not* concerned with truth, we find the following:

Hence peace and danger, order and disorder, all depend on the government of the superior. How can it be said everything is according to fate? *So, assertions about there being fate are quite false* [夫曰有命云者亦不然矣].<sup>44</sup>

In discussing the origin of internecine strife, the Mohists say,

Whence do these things arise? Do these arise from caring for others and benefitting others? *We must say it is not the case that this is so* [即必曰非然也].<sup>45</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Mozi 32, “A Condemnation of Musical Performances” (HY 55/32/33–34), *Readings*, p. 108. Emphasis mine.

<sup>44</sup> Mozi 36, “A Condemnation of Fatalism” (HY 59/36/13). Translation from Mei, *Motse*, p. 191. Emphasis mine.

<sup>45</sup> Mozi 16, “Impartial Caring” (HY 24/16/5–6). Translation mine. The translations by Ivanhoe (*Readings*, p. 68) and Mei (*Motse*, p. 87) are not wrong, but I believe that mine is more literal.

Did the Mohists (or anyone else in early China) clearly and consciously conceive of *ran* as applying to sentences *as opposed to other linguistic units* (e.g., words, non-sentential clauses)? It is disputed whether the Mohists had consciously identified sentences as distinct from other linguistic units.<sup>46</sup> However, this is irrelevant to the issue of whether the Mohists have a truth predicate. *Ran* can, as a matter of fact, be applied to linguistic units that *are* sentences, and *ran* is used to indicate that the sentence “is so” or “is the case.”<sup>47</sup> Consequently, the Mohists had a term that applies to sentences only when those sentences are true.

### I.C. The Three Standards

#### *I.C.1. Precedent*

Now let us turn to Hansen’s interpretations of the Mohists’ “three gauges.” He takes the point of the first standard to be that we should “conform to past usage in linking words.”<sup>48</sup> Because in the past members of our linguistic community have put the word 有, “there are,” before the words “ghosts and spirits,” we should continue to do so. But why should we do this? Hansen offers an analogy, observing that we typically regard it as appropriate to criticize a member of our linguistic community when she

has used a word which the community does not recognize as a word or has used it in an inappropriate situation. For example someone points to a writing tablet and says “Hand me the phill.” Or someone stands in a room with the door closed and says “Close the door.” Although neither imperative sentence is *false*, they both fail to conform to community standards for the appropriate use of language. Conformity to some normative standards seems necessary even to claim to have a language.<sup>49</sup>

The preceding paragraph seems to me quite true. However, it is not clear how it is analogous with the sort of cases to which the Mohists apply the first indicator. Those who say “There are no ghosts or spirits” are *not* using any made up terms (like “phill” for “tablet”). Furthermore, saying “Close the door” when the door is already closed is, as followers of J. L. Austin put it, “infelicitous,” because the door being open is a “satisfaction condition”

<sup>46</sup> Graham argues that the neo-Mohists did (*Disputers*, pp. 153–54).

<sup>47</sup> For some other uses of *ran*, see Goldin, “Old Chinese Particles *yan* and *an*.”

<sup>48</sup> Hansen, *Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, p. 145.

<sup>49</sup> Hansen, *Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, p. 146.

for the imperative to make any sense.<sup>50</sup> This is disanalogous with saying “There are no ghosts or spirits,” because the latter is not an imperative. If Hansen wishes to convince us that there is a plausible analogy between the two cases, he must tell us more about what the similarity is supposed to be. It hardly seems that we would “lose the defining function of language (regulating and coordinating behavior),”<sup>51</sup> or cease to be a member of the same linguistic community if we simply choose to utter a phrase that is both lexically and syntactically normal, but not the same as what our forefathers would have said. Furthermore, if Hansen’s claim were true at all, it would show too much: it would be a sort of “transcendental argument” for extreme cultural conservatism, which is an odd thing to attribute to a radical innovator like Mozi!

### *I.C.2. Evidence*

Hansen takes the second standard to be, again, not a test of truth, but rather a recommendation that we “use language as ordinary people do in reporting what they see and hear.”<sup>52</sup> Now, we can readily see how the second standard (what people see and hear) could be a test of truth (if that is what the Mohists are up to). Why should we accept it as a truth-independent recommendation, though? Hansen suggests that this reflects a concern that standards “should be objective and easily projectable and not rely on vague or controversial intuitions. The standards of correct use must be available to people who [simply] use their eyes and ears.”<sup>53</sup> As we have seen, Ruism (being a virtue ethics) places a heavy emphasis on the difficulties of “ethical perception.” It would not be surprising to find the Mohists objecting to the ethical elitism implicit in this view. The problem is that this standard, interpreted as Hansen does, does not seem to apply to the examples the Mohists give. Suppose I say “There are no ghosts or spirits.”<sup>54</sup> How is this “vague”? How does this rely on “controversial intuitions”? How is my use of terms here not “projectable”?<sup>55</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, pp. 14–15.

<sup>51</sup> Hansen, *Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, p. 146.

<sup>52</sup> Hansen, *Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, p. 145.

<sup>53</sup> Hansen, *Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, p. 145.

<sup>54</sup> Hansen, who regards the Mohist discussion as being about individual terms and not about sentences, would presumably prefer to phrase it, “Suppose I put the term ‘no’ before the terms ‘ghosts.’” I don’t think this affects my objection, though.

<sup>55</sup> This is a term from Nelson Goodman. A property is “projectable” if we can figure out whether it applies to new cases.

*I.C.3. Application*

The third standard is that of usefulness. I think this is the standard with which Hansen can make the strongest case for his view. It is very natural for us to ask why a belief that is useful might not very well be false. Nonetheless, it is not too hard to see why the Mohists might regard usefulness as a test of truth. Recall that the Mohists believe in a benevolent Heaven. (Here, as elsewhere, advocates of Hansen's view can translate "believe" into their own preferred idiom and my argument will still work.) Why would a benevolent Heaven allow the truth of a belief to become disconnected from the usefulness of a belief? Only in a purely naturalistic world, which is indifferent to human epistemological convenience, or in a world created by a cruel demiurge could what it is useful to believe diverge, for more than a moment, from what is true.

Of course, even if I have shown that it is *possible* to read the third standard as a test of truth, this does not prove that it *is* a test of truth. My argument, though, would be that the difficulty of reading the second standard as anything other than a test of truth, and the fact that the Mohists evaluate so many declarative sentences using the three standards, makes a very strong *prima facie* case that the Mohists used the three standards as indicators of truth.

*I.C.4. The Mohists and the Monster in the Loch*

In addition to the specific problems with Hansen's interpretations of each of the particular standards, there are three general arguments against his reading. Hansen's view is that the Mohists are advocating that we speak in a certain fashion simply because of the good consequences of continuing to do so. If Hansen is right, the Mohists are simply uninterested in issues of truth or falsity. The first problem with this interpretation is that it cannot explain why the Mohists offer three distinct standards. If Hansen is right, the Mohists really have only one standard: the consequences of speaking in a certain fashion. Why do the Mohists say the same thing three ways? In contrast, if the three standards are independent indicators of truth, there is no problem with there being more than one of them.

Second, consider the following Mohist criticism of the Ruists:

When a parent dies, the Ruists lay out the corpse for a long time before preparing it for burial. They look from high buildings and inspect wells, searching out mouse holes, gazing into washbasins – all looking for the deceased. If they take the person to really be there [以爲實在], then they

are stupid in the extreme. If not, but they must search for him anyway, their hypocrisy is great indeed!<sup>56</sup>

We know that at least some Ruists certainly did not think that the deceased (or even his spirit) could be found by looking around the house. Xunzi, for example, argues that traditional funeral practices (such as those described in the Mohist example) are worth practicing even though they have no influence on the dead, because they help assuage the grief of the living. The Ruists described in the preceding example may have had the same attitude toward their rituals.<sup>57</sup> If that is so, the Ruists whom the Mohists criticize were acting *as if* they could find the deceased because of the *good consequences* of doing so. But this is precisely analogous to the sort of *as-if* behavior that the Mohists (according to Hansen) hope to inspire with their own use of language. How could the Mohists criticize the Ruists for their willingness to perform actions regardless of whether the Ruists take the deceased to be there, yet themselves advocate speaking and acting in certain ways regardless of whether they believe ghosts and spirits exist? If Hansen is right, the Mohists themselves are guilty of “hypocrisy.” It seems more charitable to regard the Mohists as sincerely believing that ghosts and spirits exist and criticizing those who do not believe, yet act as if they did.

Finally, suppose we were discussing the claim, “There is a serpent-like monster in Loch Ness.” And suppose someone took no stand on whether there actually is a Loch Ness monster, but recommended that we all keep saying, “There is a Loch Ness monster.” When we ask him why, he says,

There are three reasons. First, people in the past have said that there is a Loch Ness monster. In order for language to continue to function properly, we should *conform to past usage in making distinctions in language*; this is *part of getting the distinction right*.<sup>58</sup> Second, many people say “There is a Loch Ness monster” in *reporting what they see and hear*.<sup>59</sup> *Shallow elitist intellectuals, with their elaborate theories, may think that they have good reason to correct the way ordinary people report this event, but we should continue to name this event in the ordinary way that ordinary people report it*.<sup>60</sup> Third, saying “There is a

<sup>56</sup> Mozi 39, “Against the Ruists.” Cf. Watson, *Mo-tzu*, p. 125.

<sup>57</sup> Even if the Ruists in question did not hold a view like Xunzi’s, the relevant point for my argument is that the Mohists state that they deserve to be criticized for hypocrisy if they do not regard the deceased as being present, yet act *as if* they do.

<sup>58</sup> Hansen, *Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, p. 145.

<sup>59</sup> Hansen, *Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, p. 145.

<sup>60</sup> Hansen, *Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, p. 393n86.



Loch Ness monster” has good consequences: through tourism it increases both the wealth and the populousness of the region around Loch Ness.<sup>61</sup> (However, the tour guides who act as if nearby Castle Urquhart is haunted are either fools or horrible hypocrites.)

(Keep in mind that each of the phrases in italics above is actually used by Hansen to characterize the Mohist position.) Now, Hansen is very concerned that previous interpreters have been uncharitable to the Mohists by interpreting the three standards in a way that makes them seem silly. I have argued above that the Mohists’ standards are not at all fatuous when interpreted as standards of truth. In contrast, if my analogy with the “Loch Ness monster” case is accurate, I submit that Hansen is the one who makes the Mohists seem loony.

So Hansen argues that (1) the Mohists were unconcerned with issues of truth and falsity and, as a consequence, (2) the Mohists were unconcerned with whether (for example) ghosts and spirits exist. As we have seen, at the heart of this argument is a non sequitur: even if the Mohists were not concerned with truth and falsity as semantic categories, they might still be interested in the issues of whether there really are ghosts and spirits. He gives an independent argument for claim (2), saying that the three “gauges” the Mohists give “fail miserably” as indicators of truth. But, as we saw in Chapter 3, §III, there is a perfectly plausible interpretation of the three gauges according to which they are indicators of truth. Hansen’s argument for the former claim, (1), is that there is no way to express truth and falsity (or belief) in Classical Chinese. But this is false. Attributions of truth and falsity and belief can certainly be expressed in Classical Chinese.

## II. MORE ON IMPARTIAL CARING

Hansen regards the Mohist “caretaker argument” as sound, in part because he believes that it is structurally similar to one that Derek Parfit would offer two-and-a-half millennia later, which Hansen takes to demonstrate that Ruist graded love is “directly collectively self-defeating.” Parfit says, suppose we have a particular theory of how one should act, call that

<sup>61</sup> One could even make a convoluted argument that it increases social order. We could say “The Loch Ness monster will come bite you if you are bad, but will reward you if you are good.”

theory “T,” and call the aims that T says one should promote the “T-aims” of that theory. Then, T is

*directly collectively self-defeating* when it is certain that, if we all successfully follow T, we will thereby cause the T-given aims *of each* to be worse achieved than they would have been if none of us had successfully followed T.<sup>62</sup>

Theories are self-defeating in situations that are formally like what are called “Prisoner’s Dilemmas” in game theory. The classic Prisoner’s Dilemma involves only two, purely self-interested agents. However, the choice situation can be generalized to apply to arbitrarily large numbers of either individuals or groups who are concerned only with the well-being of themselves or the members of their own group.

Consider the following example. Suppose we have a community of families in which the following conditions hold: the members of each family act according to some T that has as its sole T-aim maximizing their own family’s wealth; there are community services (police, public transportation, etc.) that, if properly funded, would contribute to maintaining and increasing the wealth of each family; it is possible for each family to effectively evade paying its share of the funding for the community services. In this situation, T is directly, collectively self-defeating, because each family in the community knows that, whether the community services end up receiving sufficient funds or not, the family will maximize its own wealth by evading providing its share of the funding for the community services. Parfit takes it to be a serious objection to a theory that it is self-defeating in this sense. For brevity’s sake, I shall refer to an argument of this form as “Parfit’s argument.”

Hansen’s analysis of the Mohist arguments raises three distinct questions:

1. Is Parfit’s argument directed against T’s such as the Ruist doctrine of graded love?
2. Do the Mohists provide a version of Parfit’s argument against the Ruist doctrine of graded love (or against any other position)?
3. Does Parfit’s argument provide a serious challenge to the Ruist doctrine of graded love?

Hansen’s answers to these questions are Yes, Yes, and Yes. However, my own answers are Yes, No, and No.

<sup>62</sup> Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, p. 55. Emphasis in original.

It seems clear that, although he never mentions Ruism, Parfit's argument is directed against positions like Ruist graded love. (This is perhaps not surprising, since Parfit is attracted to Buddhist philosophy, and Buddhist and Ruist philosophy are typically seen as conflicting on the issue of impartial versus graded love.) Specifically, Parfit states that what he describes as "Common-Sense Morality" is characterized in large part by "special obligations" to "our children, parents, friends, benefactors, pupils, patients, clients, colleagues," and so forth, and that this Morality is directly, collectively self-defeating.<sup>63</sup>

But do the *Mohists* actually use such an argument? Hansen claims to find this argument in the caretaker argument in "Impartial Caring." At first glance, this thought experiment seems to have no similarity at all with Parfit's argument. Parfit's argument applies to situations that are formally similar to Prisoner's Dilemmas. The situation the Mohists describe does not seem to be like a Prisoner's Dilemma at all. More precisely, a theory is self-defeating in Parfit's sense if, were we all to act in accordance with it, it is *certain* that we *each* would do a worse job of achieving what the theory tells us to aim at than if we did not act in accordance with the theory. In contrast, the Mohist caretaker argument shows, at most, that we should prefer a society composed solely of Mohist impartialists to a society composed solely of "Yangist" partialists *if* we will need to entrust the care of our family to someone. But this is not like a Prisoner's Dilemma scenario.

In order to get closer to Parfit's argument, we need to make two more assumptions. First, assume the Mohists intend the scenario of entrusting one's family to someone else as only an *example* of a large range of cases in which we require the assistance of others. Second, assume it is certain that all of us, regardless of how strong, assertive, and so on we are, will have a crucial need to rely on the assistance of others at some point in our lives. This final assumption implies that it will be impossible for a partialist to attain his T-aims in a society composed of partialists. So if we make all of these assumptions, then the argument seems formally similar to an argument of Parfit's type. Now, I am all in favor of reading arguments charitably, but these are a large number of textually unsupported assumptions to attribute to the Mohists, just to get them to have an argument like Parfit's. Consequently, I find it implausible to attribute to the Mohists a version of Parfit's argument.

<sup>63</sup> Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, p. 95 and pp. 98ff.

As a philosophical historian, I am interested in what the Mohists said. But as a philosopher, I am interested in what the truth is. Consequently, even if the Mohists did not use Parfit's argument, we should examine whether Parfit's argument is a successful refutation of positions like the graded love of Ruism. I think that it is not successful, for at least two reasons. First, as I have repeatedly stressed, Ruist graded love is not egoism nor does it advocate concern for one's own family to the exclusion of concern for others. As Parfit himself admits, such concern greatly mitigates the effects of partialism and makes Prisoner's-Dilemma situations less frequent. However, Parfit also stresses that any version of partialism will occasionally produce Prisoner's-Dilemma situations. This brings me to my second objection. I find quite hokey Parfit's examples of situations that are collectively self-defeating for people who live according to something like Ruist graded love. Consider this example from Parfit:

Suppose that you and I each have four children, all of whom are in mortal danger. We are strangers, and we cannot communicate. Each could either (1) save one of his own children or (2) save three of the other's children. If I love my children, I may find it impossible to save the lives of three of your children at the cost of letting one of my children die. And the same may be true of you. We will then both do (1) rather than (2). Because we love our children, we save only two of them when we could have saved six.<sup>64</sup>

How often in the history of our species has a situation like this actually occurred? This is not to say that such a situation is impossible. However, I do believe that such situations are extremely rare. And it is not clear to me that it is a serious practical objection to a theory that in certain extremely unusual circumstances it would be self-defeating if everyone adhered to it.

<sup>64</sup>Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, p. 102.

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